Classic Gamer Magazine

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PHILLYCLASSIC 2001
THE EAST COAST CLASSIC GAMER'S EVENT

Do you like CLASSIC VIDEO GAMES?

If you do, then you'll LOVE the 2001 PhillyClassic. Next year's event is being held at the conveniently located Philadelphia Airport Sheraton Suites.

Friday April 20, 2001 5pm - at least 10pm

Saturday April 21, 2001 9am - 5pm

For more details, continually updated news and information, interactive maps and directions, and ticket information, please visit the official PhillyClassic website at **http://www.phillyclassic.com/**

COME SEE THESE SYSTEMS IN ACTION AND PLAY, PLAY, PLAY:

Classic **FULL SIZE** video **arcade** games, **Atari** 2600, 5200, 7800, XEGS, **ColecoVision**, **Intellivision**, **Vectrex**, **VIC20**, **C64**, **Amiga**, **Sega** Master System, **NES**, and maybe a few surprises! Also, try your hand at some of today's classics on **Dreamcast**, **Playstation**, and **Nintendo 64!**

SELLING/TRADING TABLESPACE:

The 2001 PhillyClassic will have tablespace available for your selling/trading/show-n-tell needs. Everyone is encouraged to bring out your ***GOODIES*** for trading, selling, display, or demos! Tables are available for a nominal fee. Buy & sell games, entire systems, and accessories.

WIN FABULOUS PRIZES:

Entry into **ALL** of our arcade and console single player and multiplayer tournaments is **included in the admission price**. And by entering, you will have a chance to win some very cool prizes including games for your Playstation, GameBoy, and **Door prizes** such as a 1-year subscription to **Classic Gamer Magazine** will also be given away throughout the show.

May Your Holiday Season Be a Classic One

Classic Gamer Magazine

Classic Gamer Magazine

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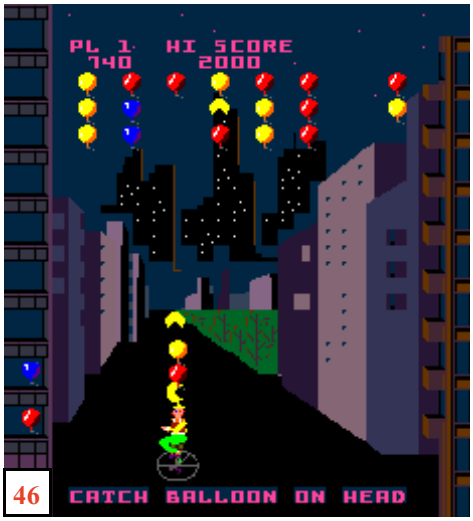

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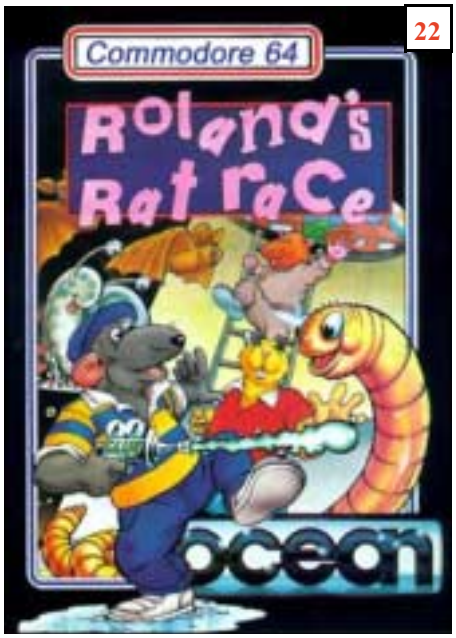

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CGM Online

So, what's Happening with our website?

In the coming months we'll be expanding our web presence with more articles, games and classic gaming merchandise. Right now we're even shilling Classic Gamer Magazine merchandise such as t-shirts and coffee mugs.

So be sure to check online with us for all the latest and greatest in classic gaming news and fun.

www.classicgamer.com

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" - George Santayana

"Unfortunately, those of us who do remember the past are condemned to repeat it with them." - unaccredited

X-Box, Dreamcast, PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Gamecube, Nintendo 64, Indrema, Nuon, Game Boy Advance, and the home computer. Sound familiar? The "experts" would have you believe we are headed towards another videogame industry crash similar to the one of 1984. However, this time the problem isn't an abundance of inferior software but an abundance of *superior* hardware. Personally, I'll take the latter "crisis" over the former any day!

But not to worry. The videogame industry has grown (and matured) immensely since the "early days." I believe, for the most part, that lessons have been learned from mistakes of the past. Yes, Sony has quite the hole to dig itself out of, but surely you can't count them out.

Sega has returned with a vengeance, producing a technologically wonderful console with quality games to boot.

Nintendo? They have quietly found their niche among the family gaming crowd. Mario isn't going anywhere.

VM Labs' Nuon technology will be a nice perk to have inside your DVD player. Besides, how else are you going to play Tempest 3000? About the only dark horse in this scenario is the vaporous Indrema console. Its Linux based open architecture, which invites a glut of inferior software (see 1984 reference above), could spell its doom in the long run. Oh yes, and the X-Box? Well, much to the chagrin of Microsoft bashers everywhere, there is one rule of business that should never be forgotten: *Never bet against Bill.*

This Issue

We've made some exciting advancements over the past few months here at the Classic Gamer Magazine offices. In case you hadn't heard, we're now being distributed at Tower Records. So, we are now truly reaching a global audience. So, to our new international readers, who might have difficulty reading English, we give a hearty "hello and welcome." And to our readers in Florida who had difficulty understanding our layout, we've tried to make it a bit simpler just for you!

This issue we are welcoming aboard a few new contributors. **Tom Zjaba** of **The Retrogaming Times** will be relating his sobering experience with "Tapper," **Al Backiel** from **The Digital Press** is here to set us straight on Xonox cartridges, and **Mark Androvich** has kindly been loaned to us from **PSExtreme Magazine** in order to give us a review of Steven Kent's book, **"The First Quarter."**

It's now time to turn your clock back to when Pac-Man was king and spend a moment forgetting about pregnant chads, the electoral college, and that Band-Aid that was on Dubya Bush's face.

-Cav

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HEADLINE

Atari Gets a New Home (Again)

New Home for Atari: Infogrames Acquires Hasbro Interactive Rights in $100 Million Deal

Infogrames will purchase 100 percent of the common stock of Hasbro Interactive and Games.com for $100 million, including game rights to the toy firm's biggest properties. The 20 year deal gives Infogrames the Atari name and its properties, such as Centipede, Missile Command, and Pong.

www.infogrames.com **www.atari.com**

OBITUARY

Commodore Pioneer, Ira Velinski, 46

On Tuesday, November 14, Mr. Ira Velinsky, 46, passed away from a heart attack while on a plane returning from Comdex in Las Vegas, Nevada. Ira, an industrial design engineer, worked for the Tramiel family at Commodore. There he won a number of international awards, including one for the design of the *Commodore 64* home computer. He followed the Tramiel regime to Atari where he assumed the role as director of industrial design. In 1998, Ira founded Sozo Design, LLC (www.sozodesign.com) in Burlingame, California as a well-respected design-consulting firm. Ira is survived by his wife Mayumi, his mother, stepfather and brother.

Thanks to Don Thomas of www.icwhen.com for this news item.

NEW RELEASES

New Sega CD Games Out

Good Deal Games is proud to announce the first two new games for the SEGA CD in almost a full decade! Both Bug Blasters: The Exterminators, and Star Strike were produced using high-end film, advanced puppetry, and 3D computer animation. Boasting $100K budgets, GDG brings the Sega CD back in style! Both games are must-have titles for any Sega CD fan! Best of all, they're available now!
Learn more at the Good Deal Games website:

http://www.gooddealgames.com

NEW PRODUCT

New Joysticks Available For Your Atari 2600

The GOAT Store has announced the completion of work on two highly anticipated products, the 2600 JAMMA Joystick and the slightly larger brother, the 2600 JAMMA Joystick LX. These two joysticks, are made from actual JAMMA arcade parts.

"The JAMMA Joysticks series are products that I really have enjoyed creating, building and selling," said Dan Loosen of the GOAT Store. We hope that enthusiasts for the 2600 find this joystick . . . useful!"

The 2600 JAMMA Joystick ($41.90) and the 2600 JAMMA Joystick LX ($46.90) are currently on sale at the company's website: http:www.goatstore.com

RECORD BREAKERS

14 Year Old Centipede Record Eradicated

November 22, 2000 - After months of repeated attempts by Donald Hayes, the 14-year-old world record on Atari's classic arcade video game, Centipede, has been smashed with an incredible 7,111,111 points. He ended the game voluntarily after nearly half a day of non-stop bug exterminating at Funspot Family Fun Center in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire.

"Breaking the Centipede record is one of the greatest video-game playing accomplishments seen in recent years," explains Walter Day, Chief Scorekeeper at the Twin Galaxies Intergalactic Scoreboard (www.twingalaxies.com) and the official judge for all video game world records, since 1982.

Hayes, 32, of Salem, New Hampshire, will be honored by the Mayor of Salem sometime in December at Salem City Hall. He will receive a framed certificate created by Twin Galaxies to commemorate the accomplishment.

Former Centipede record holder G. Ben Carter of Fremont, Nebraska was unable to be reached for comment.

RECORD BREAKERS

Perfect Pitfall

Alan Hewston has achieved the first verified "perfect" score on the Atari 2600 version of "Pitfall." The "Perfect Pitfall" score was verified by Ron Corcoran, Twin Galaxies' Worldwide Editor for the Atari 2600 and Commodore systems.

Hewston stated, " I never planned to get a perfect game, just a perfect score. By not dying or making any mistakes, I lost a few more seconds in finishing time, but mostly because I just took my time and stayed on 3-4 vines for 2 swings to make damn sure this game did not end in tragedy." Alan ended up with three seconds to spare.

Alan will be honored with a Twin Galaxies certificate and an appearance in the next edition of Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records. He will also write of his experience in the December 20 issue of Today's Heroes Videogame Retro Times (http://www.tomheroes.com).

NINTENDO 64 RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

December 2000
Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine

January 2001
Mega Man 64

February 2001
Paper Mario (RPG)

ATARI 2600 NEW RELEASES

Available Now
Sea Battle (Intellivision Productions)

Sword Fight (Intellivision Productions)

Crazy Valet (http://home.tampabay.rr.com/bprescot/crazyvalet/index.htm)

RELEASE SCHEDULE

RELEASE SCHEDULE

GAME BOY RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

November 2000
Donkey Kong Country
Dragon's Lair

December 2000
Ultima I

January2001
Qix Adventure
Mega Man Xtreme

TBA
Legend of Zelda: Mystical Seed of Power

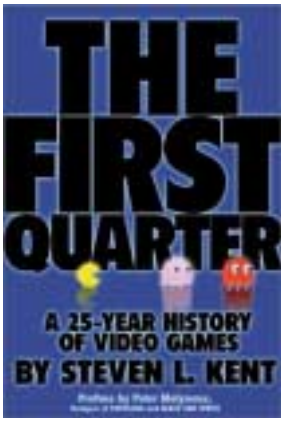
DREAMCAST RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

December 2000
The Next Tetris - Online Edition

January 2001
Bleem!

February 2001
Sonic Adventure 2 (DC)
Phantasy Star Online
Sonic Adventure 2

THE FIRST QUARTER: A 25-YEAR HISTORY OF VIDEOGAMES
By Steven L. Kent
466 pages
$21.95
BWD Press



Review by Mark Androvich

If you follow videogame "journalism," you're probably familiar with Steven Kent. He has written about electronic entertainment for mainstream sources such as MSNBC and USA Today, and has been a frequent contributor to Next Generation magazine. A few years ago, I'd heard he was working on a book about videogames. The good news is that the book is finally finished. The bad news is that, since mainstream publishers took passed on it, you won't find it at any bookstore: it is available only through Amazon.com.

The aptly named "The First Quarter" traces the roughly 25 years of videogame history, starting with coin-operated mechanical games, which predated Computer Space and Pong, and ending with the Japanese launch of PlayStation 2. All the major players and important figures in the industry are profiled, with liberal use of quotations taken from interviews with the author. In this respect, the book differs from "Phoenix"—Leonard Herman's comprehensive history of videogames which Kent acknowledges and praises. "Phoenix" has been criticized (wrongly, in my opinion) for laying out the events of the past 25 years very matter-of-factly, which is like criticizing an encyclopedia for not having a more exciting narrative. "The First Quarter" serves as a good companion to "Phoenix," as it expands upon that history with anecdotes and personal accounts.

Roughly half of the book is devoted to the Atari age prior to Nintendo's entrance into the American market in 1985, which is as it should be. After all, this was the time of the true pioneers. Every system and game since that time has built upon the foundation created by people such as Steve Russell, Ralph Baer, and Nolan Bushnell. All the myths and legends—from the overflowing coin box at Andy Capp's tavern to the burying of cartridges in a New Mexico landfill—are covered. By tracing the careers of Atari's executives, who later had a hand in Nintendo, Sega, and Sony, the book illustrates just how influential Bushnell's company turned out to be.

The next quarter of the book details the rise of Nintendo, from its initial difficulties to its ultimate domination of the U.S. market. Much of this information can also be found in David Scheff's "Game Over," but Kent manages to summarize the important events. Even having read the other books on the subject, there were a few tidbits regarding the 16-bit system "war" with Sega that I was previously unaware of.

Only about 60 pages are devoted to the 32-bit generation of systems, and much of that is related to Congressional hearings on videogame violence (which the author was part of). Perhaps this isn't such a bad thing, as the events in question are too recent to be viewed from an historical perspective. On the other hand, the enormous success of Sony's PlayStation—bringing videogames into the mainstream like never before—is truly significant and deserves more coverage. Whether due to Ken Kutaragi turning down a request for an interview, or more likely due to the fact that Kent initially completed the book years ago, there just isn't much first-hand information regarding Sony and its battles with Sega and Nintendo in the mid-to-late 1990's.

"The First Quarter" tapers off around 1996-97. Tomb Raider, and its ubiquitous heroine Lara Croft, are not even mentioned in the book, and neither is Zelda 64, Metal Gear Solid, or other late 1990's blockbusters. The only videogame media/journalists quoted or even mentioned are Electronic Games magazine founders Kunkel, Katz, and Worley and yet I'm sure there are some interesting stories concerning the development of videogame magazines. Finally, although the book opens with pinball, the recent demise of pinball is never touched upon—perhaps this would have been a good way to close the book. But, as Kent writes, there is no way to describe the ending of something which does not end.

The book is not without a few minor errors. For example, Hogan's Alley is mentioned as being prominently featured in the movie *Back to the Future*, even though it was actually Wild Gunman featured in *Back to the Future II*. Misspelled words or improper punctuation is to be expected in personal projects of this nature (that don't have the luxury of a team of editors), but the book is quite professional in its appearance.

It's a shame that "The First Quarter" was not picked up by a mainstream publisher, since it is written in a style that makes it accessible to videogame fans and non-fans alike. If I have any criticism of the book at all, it is that the majority of the material will be familiar to anyone who has read "Zap! The Rise and Fall of Atari" (1984) and "Game Over" (1993). Unfortunately, the time period that those two books do not cover, 1995-2000, is also barely touched upon here. Perhaps a more detailed discussion will have to wait for the "second quarter." The book could also have benefited from an index, and although the 21 pages of pictures were welcome, I would have liked to have seen more shots of hardware, advertising, or paraphernalia rather than personalities. Still, the photos fit the book's focus on the people behind the games rather than on the games themselves.

Steven Kent has done us all a great service by preserving the memories of the videogame pioneers in book form. When the rest of the world finally shows an interest in the origin of the largest segment of the entertainment industry, historians will thank him for having laid the groundwork.

MARK ANDROVICH is a strategy guide author and Senior Editor for PSE2 Magazine, and was formerly a contributor to The 2600 Connection fanzine. Although he's been bugging us to publish his work in CGM, we generally just use him to keep Sarah entertained at CGExpo (while Chris checks out the "nerdy" stuff).

Classic Advertisement

(Well, it's a sell sheet, actually..)

TV'S HOTTEST NAME. YOUR HOTTEST GAME.

TV has made FONZ one of the best known names in America today. Now SEGA has made it possible for those 42 million FONZ fans to spend a quarter and literally *become* their motorcycle hero in an action-packed race.

Ride with FONZ and you'll know why this game will be your hottest attraction. Because the player experiences all of the sensations and risks of riding a *real* bike in *real* competition. Even the sounds are authentic.

The object is to maintain as high a speed as possible without hitting the other racing bikes on the screen or skidding off the edge of the road. Turn the handlebars, and you corner and bank with startling realism. Twist the hand throttle open, and you accelerate along with the rising scream of your high compression engine. Collide with another bike—the handlebars vibrate and the TV screen flashes a reverse image.

Scoring with FONZ is beautifully simple: 10 points per second at the slowest speed; 10 points every half-second at top speed. A crack-up costs 3 seconds of no-score. If the total score goes above 1000 kilometers, the extended play lamp goes on—and so does the player.

To increase the challenge, the size of the bikes can be regulated by the operator. Game time is adjustable from 45 to 100 seconds.

What about reliability? You'll rarely have to futz with FONZ. It's made in America by SEGA, the people who design games that can take it as well as dish it out.

Ask your SEGA Distributor about FONZ. You'll love the answers.

Or contact us direct: SEGA OF AMERICA, 2550 Santa Fe Avenue, Redondo Beach, CA 90278, (213) 772-0833.

"FONZ" by SEGA

1976

Lost Arcade Classic

by Kyle Snyder

Odd. That's the word; the word that perfectly sums up Tehkan's Guzzler, a 1983 entry into the "cute" genre of arcade games. It's a maze game, but one quite unlike the myriad of Pac-Man clones that populated game rooms during this era. It's more of a Wizard of Wor style contest with a much more bizarre scenario.

Guzzler puts you in the role of "the guzzler," a small, blue, animated water jug. Perhaps a distant relation to the Kool Aid Man? This guzzler has found himself in a very hostile place filled with maze walls and fire beasts. The fire beasts originate from four flame sources situated at various places throughout the maze. They appear in a variety of different shapes and colors, the most common being the yellow species, which closely resembles the "will o' the wisps" found in later screens of Donkey Kong; and the red species, which sports blue shoes, yellow hands, and malicious scowls.

How can they possibly expect little Guzzler to survive in such a terrifying place? Turns out our friend has one clever trick up his sleeve. He can expel water with enough force to completely extinguish any fire beasts caught in his path. Hurray! The fire beasts are no more. But wait a second. OH NO! More fire beasts! And did I forget to mention that each time Guzzler expels water, he diminishes some of his life supply? As Guzzler's water level drops, we see his body change from bright blue to a clear outline, indicating the well is dry. So what now? There are more fire beasts to be doused, but Guzzler has no more water to use in his defense!

Except... look around, and you'll find that the maze looks like it's just experienced a brief April shower. Puddles of various sizes are scattered throughout the passageways. Hurry, rush Guzzler over to a puddle! As Guzzler drinks, we see his body change back to bright blue; he is armed and ready to do battle! SPLOOOOOSH!!!! Three fire beasts are drowned and washed away! SPLASHHHH!!!! Another two fire beasts are reduced to soggy embers. So why are these beasts so plentiful? Oh yes, the four fires. Line Guzzler up and SPLOOOOOSH!!! He successfully puts out one of the four fires. But now Guzzler is dangerously low on water again, and OH NO! He just got ambushed by a fire beast. At least he has two lives remaining.

And so the game continues. Guzzler roams the mazes, which will contain fewer and fewer walls as the screens advance. Eventually, the maze is replaced with an open playfield, which makes safe maneuvering nearly impossible. You must extinguish the first group of fire beasts, then douse the four source flames, one by one, until peace is restored to the maze.

Guzzler borrows from immediate cute predecessors, Burgertime and Mr.Do by introducing a "prize" that appears in the center of the level from time to time. In this case, a martini glass (ahhhh... the days when you could expose children to alcohol without fear of legal repercussion!). This cocktail does more than just add points to your score; it significantly reduces Guzzler's stress. No, No, No! Not like that! You see, grabbing the drink freezes all the fire beasts, allowing you a few precious seconds to attack the immobilized enemies. The beasts are still deadly though, so step lively!

It is also important to note that the area doused by your watery offense is directly proportional to the amount of water you carry. If you are at full capacity, your water blast will last for a few seconds, extending several body lengths of Guzzler, and safely squelching any enemies that are close by. The closer you get to being empty, though, reduces the amount of distance the water blast covers, until you basically... well... spit on your enemies with the last drops. It's still just as deadly to the fire beasts, but you have to put yourself in a much more dangerous scenario, as the beast has to be practically upon you to be destroyed.

Even when all your Guzzlers have been beaten, don't walk away from the machine just yet. Tehkan has graciously provided a way for you to get back in the action without investing another quarter. A "wheel of fortune" decorated with one guzzler and several fire beasts begins to spin. The object is to hit the fire button to slow the wheel down, leaving Guzzler highlighted in the window at the bottom of the wheel when it finally stops. But this is no showcase showdown. You only have ONE chance to score the Guzzler and win an extra life to play where you left off. It's the trickiest and most clever part of the game, and it's a surprise that parent groups didn't try to ban Guzzler based on its obvious support of gambling and alcohol. I mean, OUR KIDS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO GAMBLE AND DRINK! GOTTA GET RID OF GUZZLER! And while we're at it, let's get that Mortal Kombat game out of here too. Little Johnny was just practicing how to rip somebody's spine out! But I digress...

Guzzler was licensed to Centuri for manufacture by Tehkan, and it was one of the earliest kit games. A few Guzzler machines were released, but the vast bulk of Guzzlers were conversion kits for older games. The one I used to play had been a Phoenix in another life. Guzzler was never ported to any classic home game system, but had the crash of '84 been a myth, I could easily see this game having been a hot seller for the Colecovision, given Coleco's penchant for adapting overlooked arcade titles. Heck, maybe the Guzzler himself could have been in a variety of sequel and spin off titles... Guzzler's Castle? Super Guzzler Brothers? Guzzler's Adventure? He was certainly as cute as Mr.Do, Mario, or Kirby.

I saw Guzzler only once, in a long since defunct arcade across from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. It was the last in a row of about 20 games. All the Galagas, Centipedes, and Ms.Pac-mans were happily interacting with their customers, but the Guzzler machine sat alone. I decided to give it a try, and I found a compelling game that I was hoping to see more often. Unfortunately, I never did, and the game slipped quietly into arcade obscurity. Perhaps my article will inspire some of you to check it out on MAME, or maybe even try to track down an actual machine. Guzzler deserves that much.

CGM

Zaxxon

Congo Bongo

Strawberry Shortcake

Recently at the Classic Gaming Expo 2000, a panel of former Atari programmers reminisced about their glory days at Atari in the early eighties. During a question and answer session that followed, the inevitable question was asked. You know, the one that asks why the old classic gamers are better than today's games. The response from Rob Fulop was that it simply wasn't true. Every generation of games produces both good and bad games but we only tend to remember the good ones. Thus, we are comparing the relatively few great games that we remember to the entire output of games that are being produced today.

While this explanation seems to make sense, it is one that is not necessarily true. It probably does apply to the general public who will most likely remember the great cars of another era, or the great TV shows from decades past. However, where collectors are concerned, it doesn't necessarily hold water. As collectors of classic games, we can remember both the good and bad games that exist. Heck, we're still playing them!

The Atari 2600, by virtue of having the largest collection of software of all the classic systems, also has the largest number of *bad* games. Manufacturers in those days found the 2600 to be a great money maker, and since licensing and manufacturing fees didn't have to be paid to Atari, they were free to release any type of crap they wanted. However there were some games that went beyond bad. There were some games that were so bad that we'll always remember them. These are...

The Games We Love to Hate!

by Leonard Herman

Whenever there is a discussion about bad 2600 games, *E.T.* always comes up. This was a game that had little going for it besides its name, which Atari had intended to capitalize on. With only six weeks to develop and write the game, Howard Scott Warshaw actually did an admirable job of getting the gist of the film into the game. Unfortunately the game is basically unplayable, with the onscreen *ET* constantly falling into annoying holes. No game symbolizes Atari's greed more than this one; Atari actually produced more copies of ET than there were 2600 consoles. The majority of them wound up getting buried in a New Mexico landfill.

Zaxxon & Congo Bongo

Zaxxon and *Congo Bongo* were two games that looked absolutely beautiful when they appeared in the arcades. These were the first games to feature graphics from a 3-Dimensional point of view. While these games were reasonably duplicated on the super systems like the 5200 and Colecovision, it was widely believed that they couldn't be replicated on the 2600. So when Coleco and Sega released the 2600 versions of Zaxxon and Congo Bongo, it was assumed that these companies had come through with some kind of graphical breakthrough in the same fashion that Activision revolutionized 2600 graphics a few years earlier. Unfortunately that wasn't the case. Coleco's *Zaxxon*, while playable, didn't even duplicate the diagonally scrolling graphics that made the arcade version so unique and endearing. As it stands, the 2600 *Zaxxon* is just another vertical shooter. Sega tried to duplicate the 3D effect on the 2600 *Congo Bongo* but the result is so bad that the game is completely unplayable.

Sssnake

Digital Press calls this Data-Age title the 'worst videogame ever created' and they may have a point. Sssnake was probably inspired from *Centipede*, but if that was the case, imitation is **not** the sincerest form of flattery. There is absolutely nothing redeeming about this game (and the word 'game' is used very loosely), and unless you're a sado-masochist who enjoys getting frustrated, this is one to stay away from.

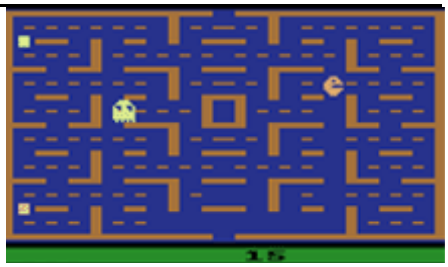
Strawberry Shortcake Musical Matchups

Videogames have always been a boy-oriented activity, but Parker Brothers aimed to change that with what they dubbed "The First Videogame For Little Girls." Unfortunately, this 'game' insults the intelligence of the 4 to 7 year olds that it is intended to entertain.

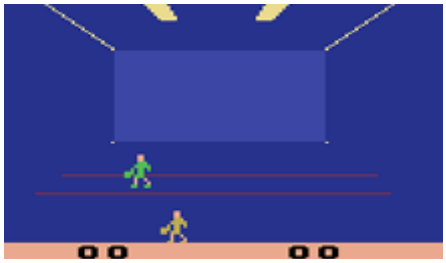
With this being the first videogame for little girls, it's easy to see how far girl games have come since then. Now we have games based on Barbie and the Olsen Twins. On second thought, maybe girl games haven't progressed that far!

E.T.

Sssnake



Pac-Man



Racquetball

Slot Machine

Racquetball

You might think that Apollo should've been commended for taking on a game like racquetball and converting it to the home console. That is, until you play it. While the graphics simulate a racquetball court adequately, the game play is just impossible. For some reason the designer thought that the ball's shadow was imperative to the game play. Unfortunately it's impossible to tell which is the real ball and which is the shadow! Stay away from this one at all costs!

Football

The Atari 2600 did not achieve its popularity by way of its sports games, but *Football* brought them down to a new level. There is probably more flickering in this game than all other 2600 games combined (*Pac-Man* included!). Unlike real football, which involves a large degree of strategy, 2600 *Football* all comes down to luck. Like most early 2600 games, Football featured piss-poor pathetic graphics. Unfortunately there was little gameplay to enhance them.

Slot Machine

I have a problem with videogame versions of games of chance. The whole point of these games is for people to risk their money in order to (hopefully) win more. If you take the money aspect away, there's little to get excited about. It's like getting to the million dollar question on the PlayStation version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. If you don't know the answer you may as well guess. After all, you have nothing to lose.

Video gambling is the same. Some gamblers may find merit in the videogames because it gives them a chance to hone in on their skills. But when it comes to a slot machine, what kinds of skills are involved? All you do is insert a coin and pull a handle! Then you watch the wheels turn for a few seconds and hope that you win. If you do, you have the thrill of hearing your coins pour out.

This is something that can't be duplicated in a videogame. There is little suspense in watching wheels turn when you have nothing at stake. And if you do win, you won't be awarded with the clanging of coins.

Even the graphics on the 2600 *Slot Machine* lack excitement. The symbols on the wheels don't resemble anything on a real slot machine.

Apparently few enjoyed this game. It was one of the first titles from Atari (along with *Starship* and *Miniature Golf*) to be discontinued.

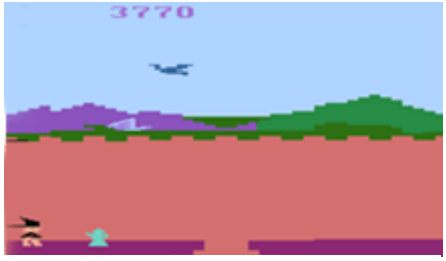
Pac-Man

Finally, no article dealing with bad games can omit Atari's 2600 *Pac-Man*. The funny thing about *Pac-Man* is that it really isn't a bad game. The only problem is its name. Here is another example of Atari capitalizing on a popular name and disappointing everyone who bought it. Atari later proved with the 2600 version of *Ms Pac-Man* that it could produce a decent version of *Pac-Man* if it wasn't forced to rush it onto the marketplace. If the 2600 version of *Pac-Man* had a different name, it wouldn't have been any worse than the dozens of other maze/dot games that were available.

CGM

Author Leonard Herman resides in New Jersey with his wife Tamar and sons Ronnie and Gregory. He is hard at work preparing the third edition of "Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames," which he plans to release in early 2001.

Football



Bobby Is Going Home

TERRIBLE TAIWANESE

There are some games that came out of Taiwan that are really bad. I'd tell you the name of the company that produced them but I don't know it! Actually, the Taiwanese games that invaded our shores were illegal rip-offs of existing games from both the United States and Europe. In some cases it was even impossible to figure out what game was being ripped off as the box's cover art, description, and screen shot were all different. However, there is a lighter side to these Taiwanese games, which may be reason enough to collect them. The description and instructions, which are found on the back of the box, are written in such bad English that they are actually funny. Here are two examples:

Little Bear:

"Your mission is to protect the Mr. Postman sending a secret letter safely to Silent City. To press the button is to make Mr. Postman should keep away from hails and the eagle, or you press the button to shoot down them. Mr. Postman can not touch the wall as he is walking on the street, otherwise all will be gone.

Scoring
Any lose and mistake: deduct 10 from the basic scores 2000."

Bobby Is Going Home:

Bobby thinks that the world is so beautiful. He feels his life perfect. But this day as he going home, he meets many strange troubles. At the start of game, Bobby has 5 lives, total has 256 scenes of the game, Bobby must pass through 7 scenes.

Scoring
At the start of the game, you have 3,000 points. When past through one scene, get 1,000 points. If bobby failed, try again plus 1,000 points too. But failed 5 times, the game is over. The scores will count down to zero, so please don't hesitate!

You couldn't write something funnier if you tried!

Photo courtesy: atarihq.com

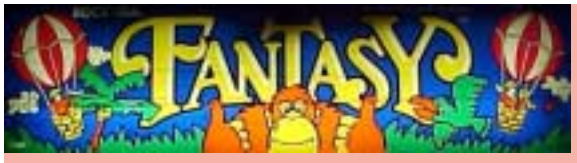
Earl Green's X-Games

Far be it from me to go with what the crowd's doing. I'm going to discuss a few games I like that few people seem to know ever existed. These are like the X-Files of the arcade - most people, and even a few coin-op manufacturers, deny all knowledge of these games. But *I* remember them. I remember playing them. I know they existed. I have solid evidence. The truth *is* out there, and it took plenty of my quarters.

Just trust me on this one.

Do! Run Run

This almost sickeningly cute entry in the little-known four-game *Mr. Do!* franchise took some of the game play of the original *Mr. Do!* and put it in a vaguely 3-D perspective. The result? An intensely fun and addictive little game set to new-wave cartoon music that would make the former members of Devo goggle in admiration. (Well, actually, they wore goggles on many occasions, so I suppose that wouldn't be terribly surprising.) As well-armed clown Mr. Do, your job is to rid the open playing field of any and all evil critters (though they're cute evil critters) before they rid the playing field of well-armed clowns (namely you). You can zap 'em (leaving you momentarily defenseless) or crush them under rolling logs (of which there are only two per screen). Your options for disposing of these vile creatures make Mr. Do! the most homicidal clown since John Wayne Gacy, but thankfully this one's considerably more adorable. The game play grows increasingly frenetic as you advance, but it *always* brought me back for more. I love it. It's a mainstay in my MAME directory now. In its arcade form, *Do! Run Run* was most frequently encountered as a conversion kit, which would turn an old *Mr. Do!* or *Mr. Do's Castle* cabinet into a new game…so you may have played this and thought it was actually the original, depending on the cabinet decorations.



Fantasy

My all-time favorite arcade game! I'm not kidding about this either. I think I'm one of only three people who have ever seen this one. Jukebox manufacturer Rock-Ola licensed a handful of video games from various entities in the early eighties, just to see how many other ways they could get kids to fork over their change. They licensed *Warp Warp* from Namco, and licensed this jewel of a multi-level quest game from SNK (long, long before the Neo Geo days). *Fantasy* is the story of a cute little character whose girlfriend, Cheri, is abducted by a bunch of no-good pixellated pirates. As the hero of the story, you must brave all obstacles to rescue Cheri. Slicing up nasty natives with your sword, dodging airborne coconuts lobbed at you by a loony gorilla, avoiding tigers in the woods, evading helicopters, and climbing your way through a level which resembles nothing so much as Atari's *Kangaroo*…this game had it all. And the real killer came in the form of four words that followed "game over": "INSERT COIN TO CONTINUE." I'd have ten seconds to scramble through my pockets looking for two bits to pump into the thing, because I *had* to know how it ended. The only *Fantasy* machine I ever encountered was in the game room at Gaston's Fishing Resort on the White River in northern Arkansas. I wasn't too interested in fishing, and apparently neither was my mother. After hearing me rave about this game, Mom tagged along with me to the game room and dutifully kept feeding fivers to the change machine as she, too, became intrigued with what the ending could be. Is *Fantasy* the greatest game in the world? Hell no. Even on MAME, I have to "insert coin to continue" about five or six times to reach the end of the game. But it is one of my most cherished video game *memories.* When I started collecting marquees, I told my wife (though we weren't married yet) that if I could ever find a *Fantasy* marquee, I'd stop blowing money on these silly slabs of plexiglas. An amusement company in Washington state finally provided me with my holy grail. I got brave and inquired as to how difficult it would be to track down a real live dedicated *Fantasy* upright cabinet…and was disheartened when the salesman told me that *Fantasy* was considered a coin-op dud, and most of the *Fantasy* cabinets had been converted into other games. I was lucky to track down even so much as a marquee as evidence that *Fantasy* ever existed. How sad. Even though it's missing the awful speech synthesis, I heartily recommend you grab the *Fantasy* ROM for MAME and try it out for yourself.

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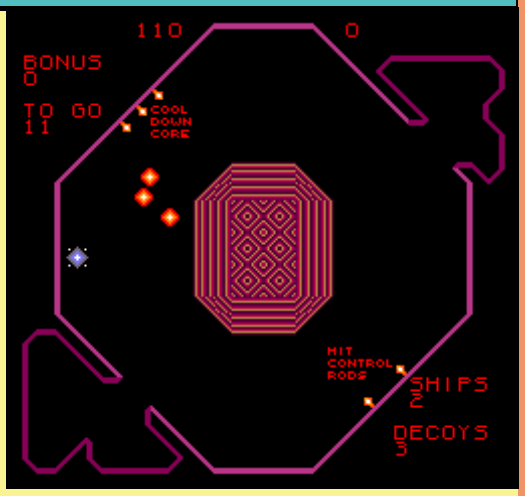
Kickman

Featuring a Featuring a cameo appearance by Pac-Man and the monsters, this lost Bally/Midway treasure is one of my favorites (except for its controller: a lateral trakball, which only moves left or right!). As a pointy-headed clown, you maneuver a unicycle across the bottom of the screen, trying to catch or pop falling balloons, monsters, or Pac-Men on your head. If you miss one, try to kick it with your oversized clown shoes. The item will bounce upward, giving you another chance to try and catch it, or kick it again. But the law of diminishing returns soon kicks in as well: while the kicked item bounces upward, another item falls from the top of the screen. If you miss even one, you lose a "life." Cheerful calliope music tinkles away in the background, and every so often you'll get to play a "challenge rack," in which you must catch balloons and avoid bombs. Why people in high-rises would lob bombs at unsuspecting, innocent, unicycle-riding clowns, I'll never know. (Then again, they may have seen a news bulletin about Mr. Do! and assumed the worst.)

Moon Cresta

This is an example of the YASIC principle (Yet Another Space Invaders Clone) that dominated many video games between 1979 and 1981. This shooter from Nichibutsu (the makers of *Crazy Climber*) has been seen in the U.S. both with its original title and in a Centuri-licensed version with different graphics and sounds under the name *Eagle.* Though it's incredibly tough to beat – the life expectancy of your first "life" is probably somewhere around 30 seconds – *Moon Cresta* has some very weird (but somehow cool) sound effects, and a novel approach to letting the player know how many "lives" remain. The player's spaceship is presented as a three-stage rocket, the top stage of which separates to play the first level. If you complete a few levels, you'll have the opportunity to perform a sometimes tricky docking maneuver with the next stage of your rocket, which will also give you more firepower (à la recapturing your ship in *Galaga*). If, on the other hand, you get your butt blown to bits, the remaining stages of the rocket will appear, and the next stage down will separate for your next round. When all three stages of the rocket have been destroyed, the game is over. I thought *that* aspect, and the wild variety of fast-moving enemies waiting to be gunned down, were really cool elements of this game.

Reactor



Gottlieb's classic bit of arcade abstracta, this trakball-driven Tim Skelly game sports one of the most bizarre game premises this side of *Qix.* It pits you as a mobile… something...trying to slam particles into the walls or control rods of a nuclear reactor, and sets the whole thing to something not unlike synthesized hard rock. The level of difficulty increases exponentially, the strategic placement of your two decoys per level becomes ever more critical, and eventually even the reactor itself isn't shielded. This creates a gravity source that can draw your…something…to its death just as easily as the pesky particles. There's something compelling and addictive about this game, and yet at best it was a sleeper hit. Just as the *Star Wars* films were perpetuated, in part, by the plastic replicas of Luke, Darth Vader, and R2-D2, some video games were immortalized by decent home versions. Unfortunately, no such animal existed for *Reactor,* whose Atari 2600 edition (released by Parker Bros.) was barely playable. Again, a good bet with MAME - your mouse makes a good upside-down trakball, and even the speech synthesis is emulated.

So there they are, five of my favorite relics. As hard as it is to find an actual working *Defender* cabinet, you'll have an even harder time trying to find one of these in an arcade, or trying to add a machine in decent condition to your collection if you're stockpiling real live working coin-ops.

? Are these Atari 2600 Games Unplayable ?

by Al Backiel

I consider myself an intermediate game player. I may not have the lightning reflexes of a teenager, but I do have a stubborn tenacity to stick with a game until it can be mastered. Every game I play I like to max out by developing strategies until I find the most logical ones (unless, of course it is an impossibility).

The following games are not totally unplayable, but they may as well be due to bad controls and/or poor game design:

COCONUTS

This is a Kaboom-style game in which you are an umbrella-toting jungle explorer who must dodge coconuts dropped by a berserk monkey. You can survive for only a few rounds because the game speeds up to an impossible pace giving you no chance to react due to painfully slow joystick response. Totally unfair! If you want to play something similar, try Kaboom, Lost Luggage, or Eggomania instead – at least you'll have a fighting chance.

DOUBLE DRAGON

This is an early street fighter game with only a few basic moves. I don't know what it is, but no matter what strategy I use I wind up getting the crap beaten out of me very quickly. These opponents are very tough and appear to have no weaknesses. I don't remember having gotten past the second screen. As far as I can determine there is very little you can do to defend yourself. You have to trade blows and as a result you take on injury. You have to be a masochist to stick with this game.

GHOSTBUSTERS II (PAL only)

The action here consists of rappelling down a hole, avoiding hazards along the way, in order to reach the bottom to scoop up a bucket of slime. Sounds gross, I know. This is a game that can be very frustrating. As soon as you start to have good run, you get stuck on the flypaper-like walls. Yet if you go too slowly, you have to deal with sawing hands, which cut your rope! If you try to fire up at the sawing hands, you end up climbing upward or a ledge gets in your way blocking your shot. If by some chance you manage to reach the bottom, you need to determine how to pick up the slime before time runs out and the game ends. It seems impossible to master. According to the box and the vague instructions, there is supposed to be a Statue of Liberty screen (which I have yet to get to!). Is the game complete? I don't know. This game requires a lot more luck than most but I have found the 7800 joystick allows for greater control.

SPACE SHUTTLE

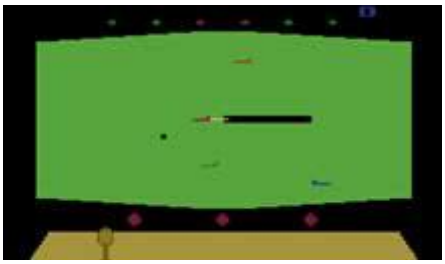
Fly a realistic space shuttle simulator from liftoff to landing while completing various space shuttle missions. While this was an ambitious game concept, somewhere along the way it went too far into cyberspace. Real astronauts are very busy doing flight checks, performing tests, correlating data, reading manuals, maintaining communications with mission control, and running things on a computer (Not to mention eating and taking care of business). I think you get the point; there can be such a thing as too much realism! There is more work than play: chasing satellites, maintaining control, etc... And there is so much data to remember, not even the console overlays help! Perhaps the author became obsessed with authenticity and trying to squeeze it all into a 2600 cart? The furthest I have gotten in this game is rendezvousing with one satellite. In other words I have yet to land the shuttle successfully! I have tried various tactics and yet I always ran out of fuel or got burnt to a crisp upon reentry. I finally gave up. I would have to say that the two Activision merit badges that were available must have been the two hardest ones to earn, and consequently the rarest. Luckily, I got mine in trade (and only from someone who dealt directly with Activision). I plan to go back to this game someday, but I think no matter how much I play, I'll never get anywhere with this game . . . not even if I devoted a lot of time to training and studying the manuals!

I don't know, maybe I just don't "get it" on some of these games. I would be open to suggestions or comments from our readers as I have been wrong before. At one time or another the following games were considered by me to be unplayable:

TOMARC THE BARBARIAN

The objective here is very familiar: locate the sword that breaks the lock, and rescue the maiden from her prison. I'm not sure what possessed the designers to think you could do two things effectively at the exact same time, but having to switch back and forth between two totally different screens just doesn't cut it (if you have a loose joystick, you will find yourself changing screens accidentally). Other bad points: You can suffer damage on another screen even if it isn't visible, jumps are hard to gauge, and the dungeons are so rat-infested that it is hard not to land on one! I have succeeded in winning a few rounds by finding the sword and freeing the maiden from the cage (which, by the way, reminds me of a go-go dancer in a disco), yet I always incur some damage. Like Ghostbusters II, it seems like the game requires as much luck as skill to survive.

FINAL APPROACH



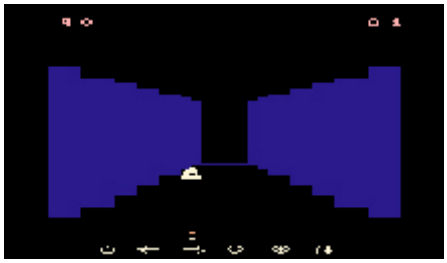
I probably read the instructions too quickly and gave up too easily on this game. When one of my user friends explained it to me, I found it to be a challenging, original game that requires more finesse and patience than most. Ever wonder why a job as an air traffic controller is so stressful? You get to be a trainee in this game and find out. You are an air traffic controller who has four chances to keep planes from collisions or near misses while trying to land as many as possible. You gain control of a plane by using the joystick cursor and pressing the fire button. Guide the plane to the dotted line at the beginning of the runway. When it is straight on top of that line, release it by pressing the red button. Quickly move the cursor down to the center button on the bottom of the screen, then fire to get to the next screen. If this doesn't work, you probably missed the button and lost the black cursor against the black background. Move it up and repeat. Screen 2 requires that you gently keep the nose of the plane on the glide path until it lands. If you veer off at the last second you will not get any new points and will suffer a point deduction. You can also get a deduction for letting a plane fall off the radar screen. So things can get pretty hectic at times. My best score on the easiest version was 380 points. Since I am slightly impatient, if I don't start off with a plane near the final approach, I usually hit reset.

KARATE

Probably the worst karate tournament video game ever made, and graphically, a real ugly game! It basically looks like two stick figures dancing, but if you can keep kicking rapidly, you will win each round and go from a white belt to a black belt. There is absolutey no logic to the increased levels, as I have beaten a black belt with my white belt. Now that should be totally impossible!

CRYPTS OF CHAOS

Navigate the maze from a first person perspective, destroy enemies, find power-ups to gain strength, and find the exit door to the next level. I couldn't make any sense of this game for the longest time. Eventually I was able to understand the logic and managed to draw maps of the four types of mazes (they were published in Digital Press). I was able to contact the programmer via email and he gave me the bad news that this game does not have an actual ending or final screen.



CGM

MY FAVORITE HEDGEHOG

by Henry Hutcheson

From hit videogames and cartoons to toys and lunchboxes bearing his image, there's no doubt the Sonic the Hedgehog series has become one of the most popular franchises today. With the upcoming releases of Sonic Adventure 2, and Sonic Square for the Sega Dreamcast, there seems to be no end in sight. But how did the legacy of the Blue Blur begin? Read on to learn the "Genesis" of Sonic!

In the late '80s, with the Master System miserably failing in the US and the ironically named Genesis looming on the horizon, Sega desperately needed a mascot, and fast! The first conceptions of Sonic the Hedgehog were a bit stranger than the final outcome, but ya gotta start somewhere. So artists Yuji Naka and Naoto Ohshima were put in charge of designing Sonic the Hedgehog (with quite possibly the fate of Sega resting in their hands). Now, don't get me wrong. . . with hits like Altered Beast, Sega would've probably survived, but they might have ended up as a third party developer for Sony or Nintendo (or even quite possibly Microsoft). After going through many different designs, Naka and Ohshima came to rest on a final image: a blue hedgehog with attitude. With that, Sonic the Hedgehog was born.

The world of Sonic is a vast one. Making his debut in popular games, Sonic later ended up on two different TV shows, a series of toys, a comic book, and even an exclusive deal with mega fast food chain McDonald's. I want to delve into what started it all: the games.

The early 90's was the perfect time for Sega: the Super Nintendo was too new to catch on yet, and the NES was nearly dead. So Sega unleashed Sonic the Hedgehog to an unsuspecting world and got rousing applause. But what made the games so special? Was it the colorful graphics? Perhaps the fast gameplay? To understand all the answers, read the following overview of many of the best Sonic the Hedgehog games that were created.

Sonic the Hedgehog

Sonic 1 had all the requirements of a great game plus more: great graphics, great gameplay, great music, great character, and, uh, well….great everything! The storyline was also creative and intriguing: In a science experiment gone wrong, Dr. Kintobor, a well-meaning scientist, was transformed into an egg-shaped villainous mad scientist we've all come to know (and love?): Dr. Robotnik (aka "Eggman" in Japan). Dr. Robotnik captured all the forest animals and "roboticized" them (turned them into mindless robots) and gave them orders to carry out his evil deeds. Our hero, Sonic, literally spun through stages in hopes of retrieving the Chaos Emeralds, which would destroy Robotnik's nefarious plans and return the forest animals back to normal.

The success of this first Sonic game turned Sega around and made them players in the videogame console market. Of course in this day and age, marketing rules, thus the inevitable Sonic sequel was created.

Sonic the Hedgehog 2

With the tremendous force of Sonic's legendary Attack Spin, Sega released Sonic the Hedgehog 2 to a legion of fans begging for more. Basically featuring the same storyline as the original, Sonic 2 managed to make considerable improvements in gameplay. Dr. Robotnik was back, but this time with new enemies and cooler bosses. The graphics were crisper, the levels longer and more challenging, and there was even a new character introduced. Yep, you guessed it, Tails the Fox! Tails, the cute, two tailed flying fox made his greatly welcomed debut in Sonic 2. Unfortunately, Tails was uncontrollable by the player. His purpose was to follow Sonic, lending assistance as needed (although you could play as him in multiplayer mode).

By now, things were definitely looking up for Sega. They had achieved a firm hold on the market, as well as making Sonic an instantly recognizable image. However, by then Nintendo had introduced the Super Nintendo to the world, along with Super Mario World! The little pudgy plumber (try saying *THAT* 5 times fast!) had returned for another adventure, and everyone wondered what Sega had up their sleeve (if anything at all) to counterattack . Well, as it turned out, they had yet another Sonic game: Sonic the Hedgehog 3!

Sonic the Hedgehog 3/ Sonic and Knuckles

Sonic 3 featured longer and challenging levels, hidden areas, more awesome music, and best of all, the introduction of Knuckles, the red, dreadlock wearing Echidna! Other new features in Sonic 3 gave players the ability to finish their quest as either Sonic or Tails and the much welcomed ability to save one's progress.

This time around Dr. Robotnik, in his quest to obtain the Chaos Emeralds from Floating Island, convinces Island resident Knuckles that Sonic and Tails are the bad guys. Knuckles, in hopes of bringing peace to his island, lays traps and otherwise becomes a nuisance to Sonic and Tail's missions.

Sonic the Hedgehog's counterpart game, Sonic and Knuckles, featured everything imaginable in Sonic 3, and introduced a seemingly revolutionary (albeit short lived) concept: Lock-on technology. Lock on technology let gamers hook up their older Sonic games to the Sonic and Knuckles cartridge and take Knuckles through levels in the older games. Remember that one spot with the rock in Sonic 3 that you couldn't figure out how to beat? That's where the lock-on technology comes in handy. You can easily get past that part by gliding through with Knuckles. With lock-on technology, plus all the improved features, Sonic and Knuckles and Sonic the Hedgehog 3 were both perfect additions to any Sonic fan's library.

Sonic CD

The Sega CD was released as an add-on for the Sega Genesis, and Sonic CD made full use of its features: Scaling, rotation, CD storage capacity, CD quality

sound and music, FMV (full motion video) capabilities, etc... However, Sonic CD offered something new that none of the other Sonic games offered: time travel.

Again Robotnik is up to no good and through time travel, he is building evil factories in the past to ensure his domination in the future. In each of the levels, there are signs similar to those found at the ends of levels in most of the Sonic games. But now if you passed these signs at a fast enough speed, you would be transported to a past or future version of that level. The future levels are comprised of post-apocalyptic environments (lots of machinery, etc…), but the past featured calmer scenery such as trees and wildlife. If you destroyed a factory in the past, it was replaced with lovely, bucolic scenery. While Sonic CD went slightly off the track with the Sonic games at that time, it was worthy of the Sonic name and a welcome change.

Near the end of the Genesis' lifespan, Sega released Sonic 3D Blast, a semi 3D Sonic game. There were also a few Game Gear games and knock offs like Knuckles Chaotix, but they were mainly believed to be stop gap games. Later on, near the end of the Saturn's lifetime, Sega released Sonic R, a 3D Sonic racing game that had originally been the now canned Sonic Xtreme. While Sonic R was a good game to some, it was far too late for Sega to regain popularity on the much maligned Saturn system.

Finally, in 1999, the Sega Dreamcast was released in America. Along with it came the arrival of Sonic Adventure (reviewed last ish!). Sonic Adventure was the complete 3D Sonic game that fans had been dreaming of for years, and luckily it lived up to expectations.

With the Dreamcast in full swing, more Sonic games are on their way, including the Mario Party-esque Sonic Shuffle and Sonic Adventure 2.

So there you have it, a run down on my favorite Sonic the Hedgehog games. With three TV shows, over 10 games, and even a full featured animated movie, there seems to be no end to the Sonic juggernaut. Sonic the Hedgehog is destined for a bright future.

So what do you do now, you ask? Well, if you haven't already, I suggest that you start building your Sonic the Hedgehog game/TV show library. As for me, I'm off to see if I can find any more secret spots with Knuckles in Sonic 3!

See ya!

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e-chid-na

Any of several nocturnal, burrowing, egg-laying mammals of the genera Tachyglossus and Zaglossus of Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea, having a spiny coat, slender snout, and an extensible sticky tongue used for catching insects.

Sonic Adventure 2

Sonic Shuffle

Sega Puts a Saturday Morning Spin on the Blue Blur

Premiering in 1993, Sonic's first show, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, was, and still is, believed to be the best show to date. The plot involved Sonic, his girlfriend Sally the Squirrel, Rotor the Walrus, the wimpy Antione D' Coolette, his favorite buddy Tails, and, of course, the villainous Dr. Robotnik.

The show, while whimsical, often had a serious tone to it. Dr. Robotnik had taken over Mobotropolis, and in each episode Sonic and his friends tried to stop him and his evil minions.

Sonic's second show, *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog*, featured Sonic and Tails, Robotnik, and Scratch and Grounder, the two roboticized minions. Because Sonic's first cartoon show was voted the second most violent cartoon in America, DiC Animation Studios geared the second show towards a younger audience. *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog* had a lighter, more comedic feel to it, and featured cheaper animation. While not quite up to the standards of its predecessor, this was still a solid show.

Sonic Underground - Ouch! Sonic Underground was giving the series a bad reputation until they mercifully cancelled it!. *SU* was similar to *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog* in terms of animation quality; however, *SU* had a completely different plot than either of the previous shows. Sonic, his sister (Sonya) and their little brother (Manic) formed a band, while at the same time were trying to stop the mayor, Dr. Robotnik from taking over the town, world, etc... While I hate to say it, this show was unbearable to watch and didn't add anything of value to the Sonic world (with the slight exception of introducing Sonic's brother and sister).

Ode To Arcade Art

Part 1: Blacklights & Mirrors

by Kyle Snyder

Walking into a typical mall arcade nowadays results in finding many cookie cutter games. That is, games that have very similar gameplay (the myriad of fighting games and first person shooters), and very similar, bland looking cabinets.

In the early days of arcades, game designers took delight in not only creating off-the-wall and unique game play, but also brilliant artwork decorating the cabinets. They didn't have monumental graphics capabilities, stereo surround sound, or 33" monitors to grab a player's attention. No, they had to create uniqueness with simple effects of light and eye trickery, and fabulously detailed cabinet art. These games literally COMMANDED you to stop what you were doing, surrender a quarter to its hungry mouth, and get lost in the experience of game play. One of the earliest examples of this is SPACE INVADERS.

SPACE INVADERS (1978 Taito)

Space Invaders, both the Taito Japanese import and the Bally/ Midway stateside release (in addition to the Bally sequel, DELUXE SPACE INVADERS), was simple and beautiful. The side art displayed giant shadowy figures vaguely resembling angry black bears. Their bodies were pitch black, allowing no luxury of anatomy differentiation. They were bordered by jagged edges, suggesting perhaps an electrified field around each beast. Menacing white eyes scowled toward anyone fixing their gaze upon them. Two of the largest creatures held missiles in their right hands, undoubtedly aiming to destroy as much human resistance on planet Earth as possible. Depending on the machine, the background that these aliens marched on was either a midnight blue (which reinforced the idea that these creatures were from deep space), or a deep blood red (symbolizing the eventual death of any human foolish enough to take on the alien armada). Both are very ominous color choices designed to punctuate the fear of the unknown.

Looking at the front of the machine, we are treated to a detailed crater-pocked landscape (perhaps the aliens were attacking the moon first?), over which three of the beasts march closer and closer, left hands thrust in the air as if in some Nazi-ish salute. Red and orange saucer ships rotate at jaunty angles in the distance, promising to open cargo doors and deploy alien reinforcements should the need arise. But wait! There's salvation! A large machine, deep reddish-rust in color, waits to obliterate any invader foolish enough to descend too close to protected soil. Its gun barrel gears up for a direct shot at the first of three creatures. Who controls this marvelous machine? The US Army? A dedicated group of scientists? No, dear player, that giant missile launcher is for you and ONLY you to pilot. Nobody else has the guts.

Looking into the cabinet at the monitor, you discover a replicated environment that is simple but effective. The interior of the cabinet is decorated with a backdrop of the night sky, complete with spiral galaxies, comets, and stars of various magnitudes and colors. A moon scape is illuminated from behind with a black light, causing the entire cosmos and moon to glow FROM WITHIN. The game play on the monitor is projected onto this cosmic window by use of a mirror hidden within the cabinet. The desired effect is magnificent.

The aliens slowly descend from unknown whereabouts in militaristic formations, in the menacing, cold, glowing night. Your missile launcher stands as the only possible defense against this extraterrestrial onslaught. The heartbeat begins... DUMT... DUMT... DUMT... the aliens march closer... DUMT... DUMT... DUMT... Can you fend them off and save humanity, or are we all doomed to perish? DUMT... DUMT... DUMT... TIME IS RUNNING OUT!!!!!!!!!!

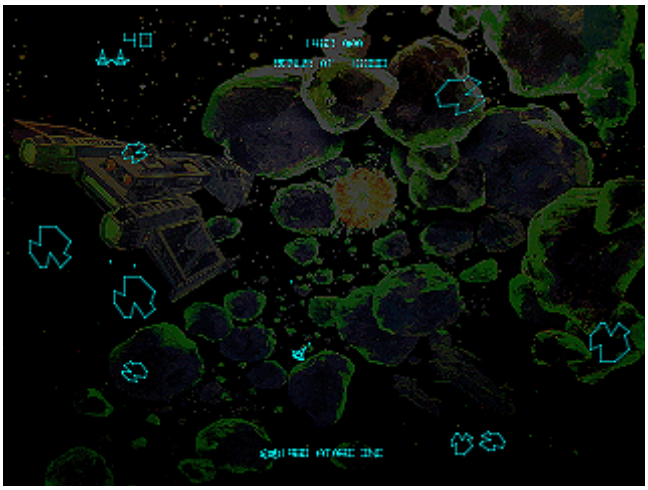
ASTEROIDS DELUXE (1980 Atari)

Another game that deserves similar appreciation is Atari's ASTEROIDS DELUXE. This 1980 follow up to the original 1979 top seller added some additional enemy spaceships, replaced "hyperspace" with a shield option, and generally sped the action up. But perhaps the most impressive enhancement over the earlier game was its absolutely beautiful cabinet design. Looking at the side art reveals a battle worn star cruiser, with its two rear mounted engines belching out fire as it barrels into a deadly asteroid field. The asteroids narrowly miss the cruiser as we see the deep craters and jagged edges of these giant hunks of cosmic rock. The cruiser's powerful laser cannons, one affixed to the outer edge of each wing, pummel their target and send one of the meteors erupting in an explosion of light, rock, and tremendous heat. The asteroids arc off into the distance, indicating the long dangerous highway the space cruiser has to navigate. Two alien spacecraft hover menacingly nearby, ready to attack the cruiser at a moment's notice. Their powerful automatic cannons have sent many an innocent craft into a frigid sleep in deep space, and they fully intend to add your space cruiser to the list. Galaxies, cosmic gases, and an eerie crescent moon complete the scene that succeeds in instantly transporting the observer into the reaches of deep space.

Looking in at the screen on the front of the cabinet may just take your breath away. Using the backdrop and mirror concept from Space Invaders, we see a gorgeously detailed close up of the asteroid field and the dark shadows that fall over their craggy surfaces. The space cruiser can be observed in striking detail, as we can almost count the rivets in each heat shield panel on its enormous frame. But wait, is that a trick of the eye, or is that space cruiser in 3-D? Doing a double take, you notice several of the asteroids themselves appear to roll outward toward you. And the alienships? One of those appears a little too real for your liking as well. How exactly did they pull that off?

The artistic geniuses at Atari designed the interior of the cabinet in a very clever way. The bulk of the asteroid field is a cardboard cut out that wraps around the interior of the cabinet. Black light falls on this artwork and creates the cosmic background. But the 3-D effects? The cruiser, those particular asteroids, and the alien ship are all cut outs as well, but are spaced slightly closer to the eye than the backdrop is. The black light illuminates them slightly more, but the eye can't easily discern that they are separate from the backdrop. So, Atari was able to create a very convincing illusion of depth in only two feet of cabinet space.

As you willingly invest a quarter, the game's brilliant white vector graphics glow from nowhere onto this awesome spacescape. The video rocks and ships appear to float amongst the backdrop in a stellar ballet of video bliss. But now the action slowly speeds up; from four rocks have sprung eight, and now sixteen as you desperately fight for maneuvering room! The alien saucers glide onto the scene, with a haunting echo assaulting your ears from the speakers. You are beset on all sides by danger, and worst of all, your shield is almost COMPLETELY EXTINGUISHED! Your tendons tense as you rapidly tap the fire button to clear a safe path through. You rotate and retrothrust so as to "put on the brakes," and send a laser blast screaming towards the alien saucer. A DIRECT HIT and it's deep explosion sounds in your ears! You take a well deserved deep breath. Your cruiser is safe. For the moment.



Coming Next Issue:
Ode to Arcade Art:
Cosmic Scenes—Gorf, Star Castle, Star Wars, Vanguard

Roland's Rat Race

A Review For the Commodore 64

by Fred Pierson

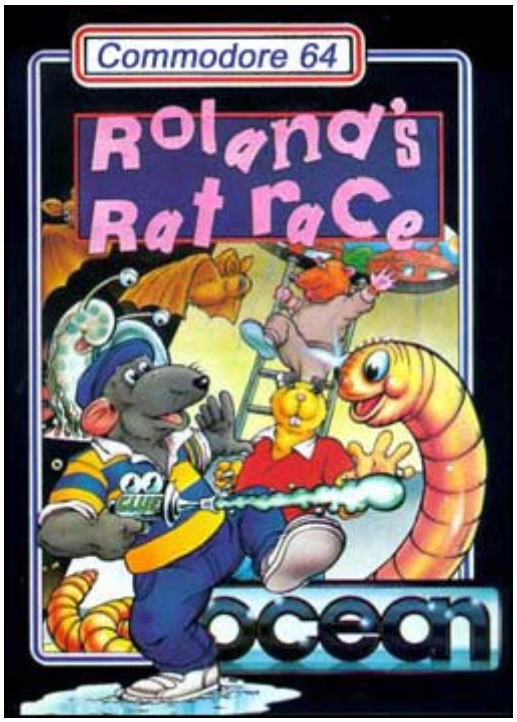
Hi there rat fans!

I asked Chris if I could come aboard CGM to provide reviews for Commodore 64 (C64) games. He willfully and respectfully welcomed me without questions. The finalization, though, came through a very short time before the deadline of this issue.

I want to make this section as thorough as possible, and have a few things in mind as time goes along. With the time I had available for this issue, I just wanted to introduce myself as what I am—a gamer, and more importantly, a 64 gamer, and thus, the position I have given to myself, and Chris has granted. I promised Chris that I would do the best job I can do, and I am sure all of you will agree I will deliver.

Now, I am objective when it comes to reviewing or analyzing anything in gaming, or for that matter, anything in general. I want this to be kept in mind while reading my reviews.

Here we go!



ROLAND'S RAT RACE - OCEAN 1985

Roland's Rat Race happens to be one of my two all-time favorite C64 games (Paradroid being the other), which makes it a fitting entry into CGM (Paradroid will be included in the next issue.)

In Roland's Rat Race, your family has been kidnapped, or rather ratnapped. You are Roland, and your job is to retrieve your family from the nasties who did this dastardly deed.

The game takes place in two areas--above ground and below ground - more specifically, the sewer. Mind you, this sewer is particularly clean, so there is no worryies about any stench.

In order to get to your family, you must find the nine pieces of the tunnel door to the room that holds your loved ones. In finding the pieces, it must be known that only one piece can be carried at a time. You then drop this piece at the tunnel opening, in essence, building the door, and go on to find the remaining pieces.

While doing this task, you must keep an eye on your energy. And there are footpairs (I never actually had any idea what they really are, so I adopted this name) that do have a mind of their own. If touched, they will drain your energy. Above ground, each screen has just one footpair. Below, there are two per screen. You will notice that each footpair emerges from its own screen entrance. Remembering this will prevent frustration while waiting to do something else.

As mentioned, you must keep an eye on your energy, as if you run out, the game is over. You may replenish your energy by eating apples and hamburgers you come across. I have come to realize that apples give you more energy than hamburgers, so when re-energizing, do so efficiently, as any excess will just be wasted.

Also to assist you are three Glue Pacs. You start off with one, and the other two may be found out and about. Each Glue Pac contains 13 shots. The Glue may be used to temporarily stop the footpairs. Also, below ground, there is a train, which provides for quicker travel, and thus, saves energy. The only way to get onto the train is to stop it by shooting a gob of Glue onto the track, causing the train to become temporarily stuck. Be careful, as the train can run over you, taking away a massive amount of energy. Getting stuck in your Glue shot will also take away some energy.

Once you complete building the tunnel door, you must find the key. You will see the key along your travels while searching for door pieces, but as said, the key cannot be picked up until the door is built.

Inside this room, you will see your family on the other side. You must dodge little buggers and Glue spots moving along the floor. Getting to your family ends the game, and you are awarded with a congratulatory screen. You may then start again with your score remaining.

Graphically, there is not much to this game. I will say, though, that the backgrounds, especially the brickline detailing, is very well done, as well as

the occasional wall cracks. The music and sound effects, in my opinion are great. The background music, albeit re-curring, is a very catchy tune, and has stayed with me throughout the years. The effects--The Glue Shot, you and footpairs getting stuck, the train whistle, the train get-ting stuck, picking up the food, and even the car echo while walking through the tunnels. There is even a little tune while riding the train. All of these just add charm to the game.

Best of all, this game is non-linear. Each time you play, the door pieces, the key, the Glue Packs, and the food are randomly located. What I like to do is see how quickly I can complete the game. My best time is just under 25 minutes. Believe me, I tried breaking 20 minutes, but I just do not think it is possible, unless all items are very close to one another; I have yet to be that lucky. Also, I think the game knows not to have too many items within a small distance of each other.

I still play this game, even after completing it several times.
I guess it's an original, and can even match up against any of today's 64 and 128 bit games. I guarantee if this game was released for the DC, N64, or PSX2, it would be a best seller.

If you have just acquired a 64, or have been the long-time 64 freak much like me, this is one game you should definitely play. You will see just how fun a game can be.

How to Cheat Like a Rat:

Want unlimited lives and glue?

Enter "**YOUNG.ONES"** at the high score screen. The entry will change to "CHEET. MODE" to confirm correct code entry.

Roland's Rat Race Tips

- Never pick up any food when you have full or next to full energy. As said previously, all excess is not put into any reserve, but simply wasted.
- Regarding the food, remember where you are seeing it, as you do not want to be wandering aim-lessly with your energy getting low.
- Use the Glue liberally but spar-ingly at the same time. In saying that, it is better to use your Glue than to use your energy waiting for a footpair to move on. Also, it is possible to run out of Glue try-ing to stop the footpairs every time you see them. Looking at your arrangement and quickly thinking will resolve any potential loss.
- The train is there for you to use. As said, this will get you from one place to another much quicker than just walking, saving on en-ergy.
- You can "reset" the footpairs by exiting and re-entering a screen. This helps while waiting for the train to arrive, or to get that item that cannot be reached without being pestered.
- There is a pattern (only one path) to get to the sewer entrance. Some tunnels and entrance/exits are dead ends. This pattern can become memorable upon continu-ous play. In the sewers, the tun-nels are a longer way to get from one point to another. There are some tunnels, however, that will lessen the trip. Also, there are specific screens which should be used for your train departure. This can be discovered throughout play.

So, what exactly is a Roland Rat?

You British readers may move on to another article if you like while I enlighten the rest of the population.

In 1983 the U.K.'s "Good Morning Britain" (virtually identical to the U.S.'s "Good Morning America TV news show) needed a ratings shake-up (or, in this case, a rat-ings shake-up). Why they thought a puppet would save an adult TV show is beyond me, but what do I know? The character proved so popular; rat mania ensued! The Rat even had two UK Top 40 records in 1983 and 1984 - "Rat Rapping" and "Love Me Tender" (Check Napster if you feel you can't live without these ditties).

Roland hangs out with such distin-guished luminaries as Glenis the Guinea Pig, Errol the Hamster and Kevin the Gerbil (insert your own joke here).

So now you know the rest of the story!

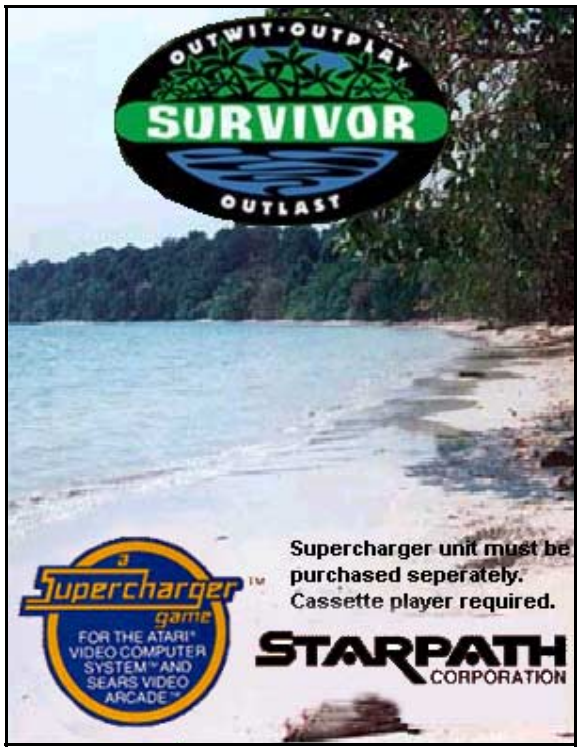
Trivia: Roland Rat was introduced by future Teletubbies creator, Anne Wood.

-Chris Cavanaugh

Roland and Friends

Survival Island

by Tim Snider



When CBS's "Robinson Crusoe-by-way-of-Price is Right" game show, "Survivor," was about to air, I thought it was a great concept for a show. And, not without a bit of humility, I thought I could easily win. After all, I'm a huge "Gilligan's Island" fan, so I already had compiled a bit of useful survival knowledge, such as how to make a record player out of a boat's steering wheel and how to build your own pedal-powered bamboo Oldsmobile. Being able to Outlast, Outwit, and Outplay the other contestants would be child's play.

One problem kept me from the million bucks: I wasn't a contestant.

However, to prove my mettle to myself, I decided to become the unknown 14th contestant and play the game at home. I broke out my copy of Starpath's Supercharger game "Survival Island" and prepared to parallel the travails of the castaways. For those of you who have never played, "Survival Island" is a multipart action-adventure for the Atari 2600. After a shipwreck at sea, you must row your life raft to the beach of a desert island, picking up supplies bobbing in the ocean. Upon reaching the island, you must explore every mile of it, looking for a means of rescue. Luckily, the game comes with a password system which allows you to pick up where you left off.

To challenge myself, I decided to play only while the TV show was on. My goal: To escape from my video game island before the end of the final episode of "Survivor," airing in 13 weeks.

Here then are excerpts from my weekly journal:

Week 1

Booted up the game for the first time and found myself in a makeshift raft miles from the shore of the island. A smoking volcano is visible in the distance. Furiously paddled to shore, picking up supplies all the way. Drowned twice, got eaten by a shark twice, got shot by a submarine three times. The folks on TV have an easier time of it. Both Pagong and Tagi tribes arrive and set up camp on the beach. I'll flounder in the ocean until next week, I guess.

Week 2

Finally arrived on the island! However, had one ration of water and no food when I arrived. Died of hunger before I got three screens into the jungle. Started over again to try to arrive better equipped. Saw the TV castaways eat live grubs. I had a Spam sandwich for lunch. Drink deep from the irony well, folks. (I make no further journal entries for fear of legal retaliation from the good folks at Hormel, makers of fine luncheon products.)

Weeks 3 and 4
After playing and re-playing, arrived on the island again, this time with plenty of water and food. Was bitten by a cobra almost immediately and died. Rebooted and began exploring the island. Much to wife's chagrin, I begin playing the game naked.

Week 5
Had to work late and completely forgot to play. Gained no new ground. Wife heckles me when I get home. I vote her off the island.
Tribal council has spoken.

Week 6 & 7
Found a scrap piece of paper and a bit of pencil near the Atari and began mapping out the island. Discovered poisoned water, poisoned mushrooms, and poisonous snakes. (Discovered them after eating them or being eaten BY them.) Found lots of creative ways to die (like trying to walk through a lava pit) and ended up restarting the @$#% game a bazillion times. Found gold coins scattered across the island. No idea as to their use. Also found a compass, but am so horribly lost, it does me no good. I walk into a lava pit from the nearby volcano and end it all... at least for this week.

Weeks 8, and 9
Getting tired of running out of my meager supplies while exploring the island. Noticed much back-stabbing and duplicitous behavior going on between my television co-horts. In keeping with the spirit of the competition, I decided to be just as sneaky. Went on the Internet and found a list of passcodes for the game. Now I'm maxed out with supplies, health, water, and food. Ha! Victory shall be mine!
Trudged through the wilderness.
Got killed by a cobra. Twice.

Week 10
Remembered the two groups on "Survivor" island had merged into the tribe"Rattana." The tribe on "Survival Island" still consists of only me. I name my tribe "Gilligana." Found out the coins are used to bribe bridge guards for passage into deeper parts of the island jungle. Heard there's a temple to the far north that holds a way off the island. Found a lantern that might be used to illuminate the dark passages of the forbidden ruins.

Week 11
Found an amulet this week! I think this is an important artifact. Reminds me of the Immunity Totem my TV compatriots occasionally win and wear around their neck. I tie a shoelace around my Bira Bira icon and wear it. Found out that hanging a 20 pound plaster tiki idol around my neck is a bad idea. The crick in my neck takes days to abate.

Week 12

Found the temple! However, the guard posted outside won't let me in. I scroll through the game's commands, looking for the "Beat the guard to death with my walking stick" option. Nope, gotta offer him some kind of tribute. Maybe more gold coins? I spent all I had getting to this point.
Wander back into the jungle, looking for something, anything, to appease him.
Got killed by a cobra. Twice.

Week 13: Series finale

I have two hours to get into the temple and find a means of rescue before the show ends. I pour over my map and discover an area I hadn't yet explored. Trudging there, I found a stash of coins I had previously missed! I ran back across the island, taking damage from cobras, lava, and pit traps opening up in front of me, and chugging down rations to keep my strength up while I fight back to the temple entrance. (On the TV, the survivors walk across a bed of coals. Fitting that I just bumped into a lava pit, taking a few more points of damage.)
I'm allowed into the temple and am stunned when the screen goes to a first-person-perspective dungeon crawl. I bump around a bit, determining that the screen would probably be black if I hadn't picked up the lantern earlier. I bump into a force field that won't let me go any further. Looking around a bit, I find a bar of gold. Holding it, I walk into the force field and it and the gold disappears! I determine that the temple's hidden treasures act as keys.
(On the TV, the three remaining survivors huddle around a large tiki idol. I rub my neck, remembering my own tiki experience.)
My amulet flashes in warning. I ignore it, walk forward, and plunge into a pit trap, taking a few more points of damage. Amulet of "Spider-Sense." Got it.
(On TV, the Final Council is judging the two remaining castaways. They're gonna end this any second now.)
I turned a few random corners and stopped. There on the ground was a box labeled "Rocket Launcher," and I was treated to an end-screen of myself being launched off the island via jetpack. I glanced at the TV and was satisfied to see the credits for "Survivor" just starting up. I had beaten the show by mere minutes.

Can't wait until next year when "Survivor II: The Australian Outback" airs.
I already have a copy of "Kangaroo" cued up and ready to go.

The XONOX List

by Al Backiel

The Xonox label was created for the videogame division of K-Tel Corporation. At the time, K-Tel was well known for their oldies record collections, which they hawked on late night TV. They chose the name Xonox because it reads the same upside down. While their games were very original, the graphics were on the blocky side. The initial releases were all double-enders; the final games were down to single-enders. Most of the games were re-released in various combinations, but some games were produced in such limited quantities that they are rare today. The double-enders were even re-released as singles and these are also considered scarce.

Apparently K-Tel marketing was either trying all the possibilities seeking the right formula, or they just wanted to get the most money for each program by getting product out on the store shelves. Chuck Norris Superkicks can be found under the following aliases: Ku-Fu Superkicks and Super Kung-Fu. Tomarc the Barbarian was originally called Thundarr the Barbarian but was renamed when the licensing deal fell through. Vic-20 double-enders are square-shaped. Many games were also made in PAL format. There may have been some connection with Xonox and Bally. The Artillery Duel cart that was released by Bally on the Astrocade looks very similar.

When one counts the number of games in their collection, it is my view that all combos should not be counted over and over, just once for each unique game. Then it becomes a question of listing the games. Is it Artillery Duel/Spike's Peak or Spike's Peak/Artillery Duel?
Here's what I have noticed: Most of the combos show the label separated diagonally into 2 triangles with a game title in each. There is a number (1 or 2) in a bottom corner of each. This provides the actual order of the titles. The initial releases did not have this style label, but their order can be determined by the way they were marketed. I have come up with a memory device that takes what I have discussed into consideration:

Each combo should have each game listed in alphabetical order with the exceptions of Chuck Norris Superkicks/Artillery Duel (the star always gets top billing), & Spike's Peak/Artillery Duel (numbered 1 & 2, in that order).

The purpose of the following lists is to arrive at a complete catalog listing of every known Xonox single or combination, and hopefully eliminate some of the confusion:

Commodore Vic-20 Single-Enders	
Artillery Duel	????
Chuck Norris Superkicks	????
Ghost Manor	????
Spike's Peak	????

Commodore Vic-20 Double-Enders	
Artillery Duel/Chuck Norris Superkicks	Very Rare
Ghost Manor / Spike's Peak	Very Rare
It's Only Rock N' Roll	Very Rare
Motocross Racer/ Tomarc the Barbarian	Extremely Rare
Robin Hood/Sir Lancelot	Very Rare

ColecoVision Single-Enders	
Artillery Duel	Rare
Chuck Norris Superkicks	Rare
It's Only Rock N' Roll	Very Rare
Motocross Racer	Very Rare
Robin Hood	Very Rare
Sir Lancelot	Very Rare
Slurpy	Very Rare
Tomarc the Barbarian	Very Rare
Word Feud	Very Rare

ColecoVision Double-Enders	
Artillery Duel/Chuck Norris Superkicks	Rare
Motocross Racer/Tomarc the Barbarian	Extremely Rare
It's Only Rock N' Roll	Very Rare
Robin Hood/Sir Lancelot	Rare

Atari 2600 Double-Enders	
Artillery Duel/Ghost	Rare
Chuck Norris Superkicks/ Artillery Duel	Common
Chuck Norris Superkicks/ Ghost Manor	Rare
Chuck Norris Superkicks/ Spike's Peak	Rare
Ghost Manor/Spike's	Common
Motocross Racer/Tomarc the Barbarian	Extremely Rare
Robin Hood/Sir Lancelot	Rare
Robin Hood/Super Kung-	Very Rare
Spike's Peak/Artillery	Very Rare

Atari 2600 Single-Enders	
Artillery Duel	Rare
Chuck Norris Superkicks	Rare
Ghost Manor	Rare
Motocross Racer	Rare
Robin Hood	Very Rare
Sir Lancelot	Very Rare
Spike's Peak	Very Rare
Tomarc the Barbarian	Rare

If one is into collecting all the known label variations, the following third parties have legally re-issued some games under their own labels:

- Telegames for 2600 (silver label) Kung-fu SuperKicks
- JerryG for CV (gold label)
- Motocross Racer
- Adams's House for CV (white label) Tomarc the Barbarian
- Kung-Fu Superkicks

There are probably others.
The label is generic with no company name mentioned on it.

If anyone has any Xonox or third party carts not listed above, please contact me at albackiel @aol.com.

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Teach Your Children Well!

(Yes, that is a Crosby, Stills and Nash song title, so sue me!)

By Tom Zjaba

Ask the average kid today what the first video game system was and the answer will most likely be “Nintendo.” I know that this sickens the typical classic gaming fan, but for most people under 20, video games began with the Nintendo. Like it or not, that’s the way it is. Sure, there are exceptions and some kids know about Atari, Coleco, Intellivision, and the rest of the classic systems that were so instrumental in developing the market that exists today. But for the majority of people, they neither know, nor do they care about the older games.

This is where you step in. As a card carrying member of the classic video game community, you have an obligation to spread the word. It is up to you to go forth and enlighten the masses. It is time to put down that joystick and let the world know about the contributions that the early companies and programmers have made to the video game industry.

But before you go with your Digital Press in one hand and an Atari joystick in the other, you need to think about how to approach this situation. If you go in there praising to the heavens about how great and wonderful these classic games are and then hook up an Atari, do you know what you’ll get? You will get strange looks and a total lack of interest. When today's youth look at an Atari game, they will see a crudely drawn, poor sounding, repetitive game. They will not see the simple, but engaging gameplay. They will not see the inspiration for the games they are playing now. They will only see something that doesn't look like much fun to them. Remember, they have been raised on CD Rom games and are used to games that have all the visual splendor that we only dreamed of. They are used to full sound with real music, not the blips and bleeps that we grew so accustomed to.

To really get through to today's youth, we need to reach them at a level they can relate to. We need to use some old fashioned camouflage to get the point across. And what better way to approach the youth of today than in the form of "useless trivia." Instead of trying to convert them, we need to start by educating them, taking basic video game knowledge and turning it into useless trivia. Next time you see a kid playing with a Game Boy, ask him if he knows what the first portable game system was? When he stares at you with a blank expression, or worse, answers “Gameboy,” you can tell him that the Microvision was the first one. Let him know he can stump his friends with that one.

Other trivia you can use would be: the first home video game system (the Odyssey), the first cartridge based console (the Channel F; make sure to tell them the carts looked like 8-tracks, which may require some further explanation), and who was the first third party company (Activision). This way you are giving them a quick lesson and it doesn't seem like real education. Plus, you give them something they can use to show their intellectual superiority over their friends, and every kid wants that! Later you can add your own trivia, as this is just for starters.

So now that you have done your good deed for the day, helping spread the word on classic games and their inspiration on the video game market, you can rest for the moment. Just as Rome wasn't built in a day (has any city been built in a day?), neither can we enlighten so many overnight. It will take time and a collective effort to get this message across. Just remember that we need to be patient and give them a little bit at a time. We will get nowhere by belittling their current games or by praising our beloved systems. We need to start a small foundation of information and with some luck, we can build on it, and soon people will know a little of the history of video games. Tune in next issue as we talk about how you can build a solid foundation of classic game appreciation with your own children.

Tom Zjaba has been writing about classic video games for nearly four years with his online monthly newsletter, Retrogaming Times. He is an avid collector of video game memorabilia and has played and enjoyed classic games since the days of Pong. He can be reached at tomheroes@flashcom.net or tomheroes@aol.com. You can read Retrogaming Times and tons of other stuff on his webstie at http://tomheroes.com.

CGM

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Games of Blame

or

("Hey Mister! Thanks for the Quarter!")

an Editorial by Earl Green

Sometime circa 1982 or '83, my father had to go to the local Safeway store, and as always, I was more than eager to tag along. Why? Because that Safeway store always had four or five arcade games - usually pretty good ones, too. Around this time, Safeway had gotten a big, beautiful Kangaroo coin-op, and I was determined to beat that game. Thus, at the tender age of ten, when most kids are eager to get away from their astonishingly unhip parents for fear of embarrassment, I always, *always* tagged along with whoever was going to Safeway.

I remember this incident distinctly, not for what happened, but for what my mother said afterward when I told her about it. I was kickin' ass on Kangaroo, all the way down to the final screen, where one must K.O. enough monkeys to merit a spot on the ASPCA's blacklist to save little Joey.

An older man – obviously beyond his late teens – stood over my shoulder and watched, and a couple of times said "Wow." He apparently thought I was doing pretty well. (Thanks to my family's propensity for emptying the fridge of groceries so quickly, I had gotten plenty of opportunities for practice with every return to the store.)

And then he put a quarter on the cabinet, up against the marquee. *Cool!* I thought. *Man, he thinks I'm doing so well, he's just gonna chuck another twenty-five cents at me so he can watch me play another round!*

I had never seen anyone do that before, so what was I supposed to think? Admittedly, my mother had conditioned me by once unloading probably ten dollars worth of quarters on me so I could show her what happened at the end of a game of Rock-Ola's *Fantasy*, but I'd never had a total stranger give me a quarter! Cool!

In the two or three years to come, when arcade games were still cool and didn't involve emptying machine gun rounds into enemies (or flattening them with a barrage of karate kicks), I later learned what an incredibly stupid breach of arcade etiquette I had committed. For, on that day in Safeway, right in front of the guy who'd put his quarter up on the cabinet, *signifying that the next game was his,* I finished my game, took that quarter, and popped it into the machine to take another swipe at ruling the jungle.

"I believe that one of the reasons classic games are back is because many of us who played them as kids now have kids of our own…and those who have become parents are worried about video game violence."

You're probably thinking, *Jeez, Earl, how could you have been so stupid?* That's a good question. An even better question is: *what the hell is a kangaroo, indigenous to the desert outback of Australia, doing in a tropical jungle full of monkeys?*

My mother was more interested in the first question, however. When I told her that some total stranger had just put a quarter up there so I could play another game, she sternly, but worriedly, said, "I don't think that's why he put it there."

Oh. *Now* she tells me. I guess Mom had learned more from her brief obsession with *Ms. Pac-Man* than I'd given her credit for.

She then wondered how my mysterious – and quite unaware – benefactor had responded. Good question. Come to think of it, he had given me a bit of a funny look. The kind of look that presages the truncated question "…the *hell* are you thinking, kid?" And then he had walked off. Oops.

Mom was still worried, however. Had he said anything? Approached me? Threatened me? To my elder gamer's credit, he hadn't. He was undoubtedly frustrated, but if he reacted as I would have in my late twenties, he probably stewed over it for about two minutes, then started laughing around the time he got to frozen foods.

But my mother's concerns were real – and valid. And this was just in 1982, back before the days of teenagers walking into their schools with high-caliber weapons and explosive devices, before the era of road rage, before I became well-acquainted with anyone's middle finger as shorthand for frustration.

Now it's 2000. Eighteen years later. And these things that were unthinkable in 1982 *do* happen. And who gets the blame? Everything from *The Matrix* to Duke Nukem to Judas Priest. Most ardent gamers respond to these accusations with a derisive snort of laughter, and an almost knee-jerk denial. But can we discount it so quickly? Perhaps not.

No one can deny that the classics are coming back. Those of us who are in the twilight of our twenties (or the dawn of our thirties) are dragging the classic games back into action, sometimes kicking and screaming (the games, that is, not us – well, for the most part, anyway). And I have a theory that there's a reason for this beyond the "critical mass of nostalgia" that J.C. Herz mentions in Joystick Nation.

I believe that one of the reasons classic games are back is because many of us who played them as kids now have kids of our own…and those who have become parents are worried about video game violence.

I'm sure I just scared someone off. It's that knee-jerk reaction: *It's not the games' fault, dude! Let it go.* Now, even though I'm not a parent (I'm holding that particular wolf at bay as long as possible!), I'm of the school that values taught at home will shape how a child filters such influences as games, music, TV, and movies. I'm also of the opinion that the amount of time parents spend with their kids can also have a great effect on how children perceive those influences.

But can you blame parents for wanting to have some say in those influences? I firmly believe this is why the classics are back. We'd rather give our kids Q*Bert and Pac-Man than Tomb Raider or Doom. Even Kangaroo, in which your job is to punch out the lights of any monkey who gets close enough

to harm your Mama Kangaroo, seems a little more noble than the average fighting game. It seems like many fighting games are about seeking glory or vengeance. Mama Kangaroo's trying to get her child back…and perhaps so, too, are modern-day parents who used to help her out with a fast finger on the action button and a steady wrist behind the joystick.

I'm not hopping on the bandwagon and saying that Doom single-handedly drove two troubled teens to commit mass-murder in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. But could today's video and computer games - with their realistic ammo, force-feedback, and graphic bloodletting – inspire violence in a child who hasn't been taught to properly process that information as fantasy, and who hasn't been taught how to find healthier ways to deal with anger and rejection? Oh yeah. You betcha.

"Mama Kangaroo's trying to get her child back…and perhaps, so too are modern-day parents …"

And we're responsible. Our society has gradually come to accept the casual violence of modern film and interactive entertainment. Our society has also distanced itself from its children – parents have busy professional and social agendas, and it seems more and more that they can't process their kids' expressions of isolation, or fear, or anger, so they look the other way, hoping these issues will resolve themselves. Parents don't know how to deal with these things any more than their kids know how to process those feelings without sinking into self-destruction. We've allowed both of these things to happen. We are responsible for the results.

Therefore, I think there's more to my classic gaming obsession than my own nostalgic quest for the good old days. I'd love to introduce more kids to these older games. I bet quite a few vintage video game veterans would like to do the same with their own kids also.

To be fair, there were certainly plenty of horrible deaths to be suffered in the days when 48K was a lot of memory for a game to take up. With my help, poor Pitfall Harry was stung by countless scorpions and engulfed by many an alligator. The populations of entire worlds fell helplessly if I was having an off day behind the controls of Defender. Pac-Man and his whole family have died a thousand deaths with me as their clumsy guide. Pooyan and her piglets always, without fail, became slabs of bacon on some wolf's plate. My sincere condolences to all those poor civilians who wound up wearing the footprints of hulk Robotrons. Evil Otto used to eat me for lunch on an alarmingly regular basis. And let's not even talk about the inevitable fate of Mama Kangaroo.

But I knew it wasn't real. And never once did I walk away from a video game, or a movie, or an adolescent fistfight, with any intention of ending it by the most final and bloody means possible. I knew better. I knew that the games were my release – the place where I would deposit my anger, rather than allowing anger to eat me alive until I saw red.

The classic games forced you to develop skill and focus – or get out of the way of the more experienced player who just placed his quarter on the game's marquee (see, I eventually learned!). Their primitive graphics forced you to use your own imagination – the classics are to modern 3-D games what 1940s radio drama is to a viewing of *The Matrix* on DVD with a good surround sound system and a big screen TV. It's no coincidence that imagination is needed to creatively solve any conflict - to settle problems without raising voices or fists.

It all comes down to what kids have been taught. But for those who are particularly young or impressionable, what could it hurt to break them in on some classics first? Maybe not Robotron, but perhaps something a little more innocuous like Kangaroo.

And hey, parents, while you're introducing your kids to video games…do them a favor and tell them what the deal is with the quarter some guy just put on the cabinet. A stranger put it there, and they shouldn't take things from a stranger. There are things that should be done, and things that should be avoided…on both sides of the screen.

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Whenever I'm in the company of Atari 2600 fanatics, there's one comment I seem to inevitably make that will enrage them quicker than you can say "Tramiel."

"You know, I've always thought Yars' Revenge kinda sucked," I'll opine amidst gasps and swoons from my fellow classic gamers. Sometimes one of them will be so overcome with fury he'll actually faint.

Usually when I make this blasphemous observation, the gathered masses scream "Heretic!" and try to stone me to death using their spare Combat and E.T. carts. (And let me tell you, those blunt plastic corners can leave a heck of a welt.)

Don't get me wrong. I don't have an insect prejudice. Heck, some of my favorite Atari 2600 games are insect games! I love Activision's Spider Fighter. I enjoy Atari's Centipede. I'll even fire up Data Age's Bugs on rare occasion when I'm either bored or incredibly drunk. But Yars' Revenge leaves me cold.

No, make that *frigid*.

Although I feel like an infidel with my dislike of a game that seems to be so popular with - well - EVERYBODY, I have a very good reason why I've never grown fond of Yars' Revenge. It's because, well, I just don't *get* it. Just as I don't understand the appeal of "The Tom Green Show," I can't grasp why everybody - why ANYBODY - would enjoy this game.

They say first impressions are important ones. Perhaps that's where it all went wrong for me. I remember my first experience with Yars. My pal Roger and I used to trade Atari carts the way kids today trade Pokémon cards. Well, one weekend Roger invited me over to his house to play the latest game he'd picked up.

"Wait 'till you see this," he said as he plugged the cart in.

The first thing I was treated to was a horrific buzzing static coming from his television.

"Hey Rog, your TV speaker's busted," I pointed out. That was when he told me that I was listening to the underlying sound for the entire game.

"OK, so you

have to steer the flying bug around, see?" Roger helpfully pointed out. "Now, you can either shoot through the shield or you can eat the bricks away."

"Eat the bricks?" I asked. "How come?"

"You just can," Roger answered. "Now then, see the floating dot? That will destroy you if you run into it. But you can hide in the force field in the center of the screen."

"Why is it there?" I asked.

"It just is," he answered.

I was already beginning to hate this.

"Once you eat through the shield, you can shoot the cannon. But watch out, it shoots pinwheels. That's about it!" Roger finished.

"Uh-huh, *right*," I said as I went home to play my umpteenth game of Frogger.

Even the cart's label was a big turn-off for me - a big silver horsefly shooting orange snotballs out of its nose. Mmmm, tasty. Why didn't they show a big silver horsefly gnawing on a cinder block? That would've been more in keeping with Yars' oral fixation!

I voiced my objections to this game so often back in Ye Olden Days, Roger once gave me a can of Raid with a label reading "YARS REPELLENT" he had pasted on it.

I eventually found out how the game got its name. As I hear it, Howard Scott Warshaw - the creator/programmer of Yars' Revenge - took the first name of Ray Kassar, CEO of Atari at the time, and spelled it backwards. Back then, I felt somewhat insulted by this simplistic method of naming a game. I felt he could've just brought his hand down on the keyboard and came up with a better one.

Let's see: "Tdnivfjn's Revenge." Hmm, I like it.

Now, I'm not trying to hammer Mr. Warshaw. I personally think the man's a game-designing genius. Raiders of the Lost Ark is one of my favorite games and, God help me, I even love E.T., another one of his programming miracles. Although I don't like Yars' Revenge, I can certainly appreciate the time and effort it took in coming up with a game with a completely original storyline and gameplay never before seen in another game at that time.

Yars' Revenge isn't a *bad* game. I'm not saying it is. I'm just saying that it's not my cup of Earl Grey, is all.

I realize that I'm in a class of one as far as Yars' Revenge is concerned. I'm forever being accused of suffering from massive head trauma every time I sneer at the silver bluebottle fly. I can honestly say that I've never met another person who dislikes this game.

I also realize the popularity of Yars' Revenge cannot be denied. Yars' Revenge has appeared in Read-Along Books, on lunchboxes, in comic books, and on other forms of collectible memorabilia. The game even recently made a comeback of sorts when an adaptation by Telegames appeared on the Game Boy Color.

Impressive stats for a snotball-firing, brick-eating, pinwheel-dodging housefly.

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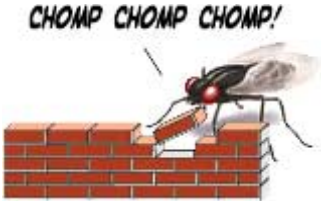

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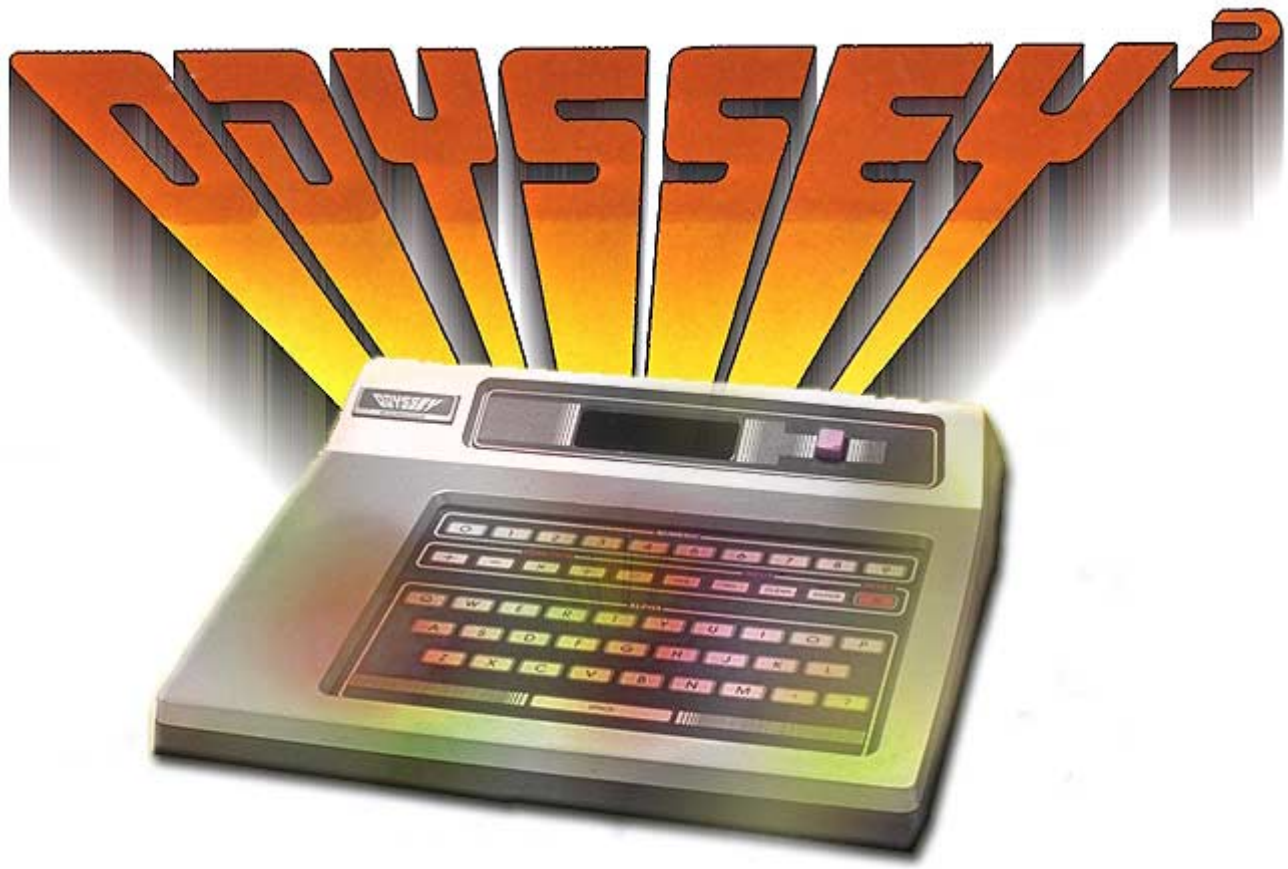


By Any Other Name:
The Odyssey² Challenger Series

It didn't take anyone long to figure out, after the stellar success of Atari's VCS adaptations of *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids,* that the most successful home video games in the early eighties would be riding the coattails of their coin-operated cousins. And, with the impressive returns on Atari's investment in other companies' titles (as well as popular games from their own arcade division), the coin-op licensing business became very expensive. Mattel was able to score some minor victories, licensing Data East games such as *Burgertime* and *Lock 'n' Chase,* but for the most part, Mattel's licensing coups were attached to other entertainment franchises – pro sports entities (almost all of Mattel's sports games had some kind of logo attached to it, be it Major League Baseball or the NFL), non-video games (Dungeons & Dragons), and films (the trilogy of games based on *Tron*). Coleco was quick to do deals with Nintendo, Exidy and Universal.

And the Odyssey 2?
Well...they had the Challenger Series...

By Earl Green

UFO

Despite the fact that initial sales of the Atari VCS and the Odyssey 2 were almost neck-and-neck at the beginning of the race, *Space Invaders* for the VCS changed the landscape, and Atari vaulted forward. It's not that the Odyssey lacked compelling features (such as its keyboard) or decent games…but what the Odyssey 2 did lack was a parent company (originally Magnavox, later Europe-based North American Phillips) with licensing muscle and a budget to match.

So the Odyssey 2 game design/programming team decided to approximate the popular games as closely as they could without getting in trouble.

It almost – and I stress *almost* – worked.

From *Asteroids* To Asterisks

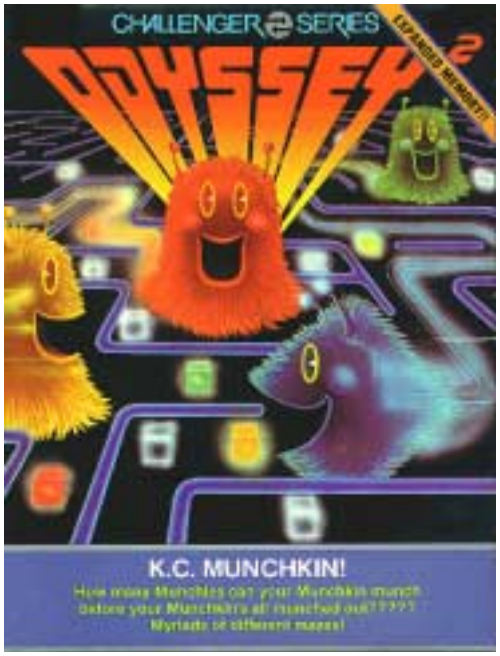
The Odyssey 2 was infamous for its limited graphics set. Few of the games programmed for this supposedly advanced platform included the extra effort of custom characters. Magnavox introduced the first Challenger Series cartridge, *U.F.O.,* in 1980, and there was little doubt which game it was attempting to approximate. In *U.F.O.,* players control an armed spacecraft, weaving and diving through an ever-thickening field of randomly drifting U.F.O.s – actually spinning asterisk characters. The player's ship has a shield, which can be used to ram the onslaught of U.F.O.s, but an attempted ram while the shield is regenerating can be fatal. The player's ship can also shoot, but this too forces the shield to go down for a moment, leaving the ship vulnerable. Speedier U.F.O.s periodically streak across the screen, trying to take the player down with a rapid-fire barrage of shield-draining shots (not unlike the flying saucers in *Asteroids*). In some ways, given the shield element, *U.F.O.* bears more resemblance to *Asteroids Deluxe* than to the original.

This "near beer" resemblance was nothing new for the Odyssey 2, however. *Alien Invaders – Plus!* had shamelessly aped *Space Invaders,* and that was only one example from the non-Challenger titles released in 1980. One could be forgiven for thinking that the only added "challenge" offered by the Challenger series was the ability to enter a six-character name next to the highest score achieved, which would then remain on the screen until someone accumulated a better score.

Far, far better – and more controversial – Challenger Series titles were yet to come.

Copping A Look (And Feel)

The success of *Pac-Man* was a clear signal: thou shalt develop a maze-based munching game, or thou shalt fall by the wayside. North American Phillips heeded this unspoken warning with the creation of the *Pac*-like game *K.C. Munchkin.* In *K.C.,* the player controlled the title character, a blue creature consisting of an enormous mouth, eyes, antennae…and not much more. Three multicolored monsters chased K.C. around the maze. K. C., in the meantime, chased 12 floating dots around the maze, four of which



equated to *Pac-Man*'s power pellets, enabling K.C. to munch his pursuers, who would then scurry back to a rotating central receptacle to regenerate.

In truth, it wasn't a bad game. *K.C. Munchkin* introduced numerous innovative twists on the basic game play of *Pac-Man,* including an option to edit existing mazes or create new ones from scratch… but at its heart, and nobody even attempted to deny it at first, *K.C. Munchkin*

K.C. Munchkin

Freedom Fighters

was, essentially, *Pac-Man* painted blue. But the little blue guy did his job – especially when Atari's VCS version of *Pac-Man* turned out to be a train wreck of a game. Consumers vented their frustrations with Atari…while the video game magazines, and word-of-mouth advertising, touted the fact that Magnavox's Odyssey 2 console (presumed dead by many in the face of Atari's astounding ascendancy), had a better *Pac-Man* than Atari themselves. Sales of both *K.C. Munchkin* and the Odyssey 2 console itself were bolstered by this news.

Therefore, Atari once again proved to be ahead of its time…and sued.

The landmark Atari vs. North American Phillips case was one of the first "Look and Feel" decisions issued and upheld by a United States court. Atari sought to prove that Phillips' *K.C. Munchkin* infringed on the graphical look and "feel" (presumably meaning the game play itself) of *Pac-Man.* It was impossible for North American Phillips to win the case, and the company had to pull *K.C. Munchkin* from store shelves. Atari vs. North American Phillips was far from the last Look And Feel case; only a few years later, Apple Computer sued Microsoft for the similarities between the then-new Windows graphical user interface and Apple's Macintosh user interface. The lawsuit sparked by *K.C. Munchkin* was a landmark decision, frequently revisited by new software-related Look And Feel suits, and has bestowed an odd kind of immortality to one of the best games ever made for the Odyssey 2.

For some Odyssey 2 owners, there were hopes that this meant their existing *K.C. Munchkin* cartridges were now highly valuable collectors' items…but the truth was that *K.C.* had sold so well, the cartridges were actually rather common. But to this day, a mystique remains; a presumption that since *K.C. Munchkin* was yanked off the shelves, only a few exist in collectors' hands. This isn't quite the case.

More lamentable was the game called *Freedom Fighters!,* a side-scrolling shooter designed to capitalize on the popularity of the arcade game *Defender.* Boasting a similar premise – piloting a high-speed ship in an attempt to pick up helpless POWs encased in purple boxes while

Monkeyshines

avoiding/shooting everything else in sight – *Freedom Fighters!* was hampered by a pointlessly complex control scheme. It required players to use the right joystick to pilot the ship while in "hyperspace" (scrolling) mode, and the left joystick while at "sublight" speeds (confining the ship to the area shown on screen).

North American Phillips' other 1981 Challenger Series title was a bizarre attempt at a logic game involving men and monkeys. Two players tried to tag monkeys and then avoid them, or something like that. As with *K.C. Munchkin, Monkeyshines* players could edit the maze-like playing field of platforms and walls. The instruction manual even suggested one variation of the game in which adding or deleting platforms in midgame could add to the challenge. Some gamers speculated that the primate premise was an attempt to create an Odyssey 2 version of *Donkey Kong*…but this theory was disproved in 1982 by a burly man wielding a pick axe.

Pick Axe Pete

Speak Up!

1982 saw the release of the best game ever created for the Odyssey 2: *Pick Axe Pete.* To some observers, the creation of a game so obviously close to the basic premise of *Donkey Kong* was a daring move for North American Phillips; it had been slapped with an injunction from Atari barring it from further sales of Pac-Man clone K.C. Munchkin. In *Pick Axe Pete,* players control an agile miner who starts in the middle of the screen with a pick axe. Boulders emerge from three doors at the top, bottom, and center of the screen, and ladders snake down, allowing Pete his only chance to climb to the next level. Pete's pick axe deteriorates after a few seconds, leaving him helpless to do anything but jump over or duck under the boulders. Periodically, new pick axes appear on the bottom floor, and keys rocket up to the top floor. A new pick axe will last about as long as the old one did, while grabbing a key allows Pete to dive into one of the three doors, advancing to the next level. A section of one of the floors disappears with each succeeding level, giving the bouncing boulders more room to pick up speed and fling themselves in different directions.

Sure, no giant apes were flinging these boulders at you, but the game's inspiration was obvious. Still, there were enough unique elements to *Pick Axe Pete* to put adequate distance between the Odyssey 2 game and the original to avoid another lawsuit – and the game is frighteningly addictive. Some may disagree with me about my declaration that *Pick Axe Pete* is the ultimate Odyssey 2 cartridge, but it's one of the few Odyssey games that can lead to a single round lasting into the wee hours. I once played a single game of *Pete* that lasted almost seven hours. What a great game. And after that, I *really* had to hit the can.

Later in 1982, the newest Odyssey 2 innovation came along – the Voice of Odyssey 2 piggyback speech synthesizer. The bulky unit, which contained its own speaker, rested atop the Odyssey 2 console, plugging into the console's cartridge slot and providing a new one of its own. With "specially programmed games" (touted the advertising), the Odyssey 2 could now talk. Though this was nothing more than a minor embellishment in game terms, North American Phillips made sure it was noticed by creating a new Challenger Series title – one which starred an old friend, and the last character anyone *ever* expected to see on their screen again.

The first Voice-Enhanced Challenger Series game was *K.C.'s Krazy Chase,* a sequel to *K.C. Munchkin.* In his latest adventure, K.C. tried to chomp on the segmented body of the Dreaded Dratapillar from Venus without making contact with the centipede-esque creature's head. Two "Drats" also wandered the maze, and couldn't be defeated without eating a segment of the Dratapiller. This bizarrely original game featured constant goading and encouragement from the Voice, saying things like "That's incredible!" and "Look out!" and "Oh no!" in a slightly demented, game-show-host voice. Better yet, nobody could sue for this game – sure, it borrowed elements of *Pac-Man* and *Nibbler,* among others, but threw them into a blender set on "puree'" until the ingredients came out as a very playable and different game.

Attack of the Time Lord

Time Lords, Turtles, and Bees, Oh My!

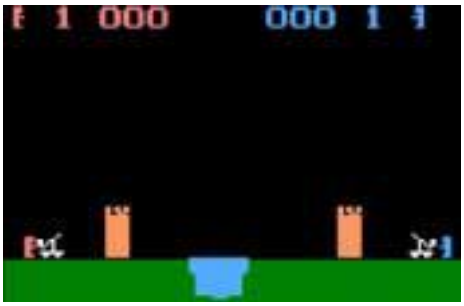
Any science fiction fan who's been alive since the late 70's can tell you what a Time Lord is. Of course, it's a member of the same mystical, secretive alien species that gave rise to the lead character in Doctor Who! At least that was what I thought in 1983. Lo and behold, my parents got me the Odyssey 2 cartridge *Attack Of The Time Lord!* for Christmas. The next thing I knew, I had a Time Lord shooting at me; specifically, the skeletal Spyruss the Deathless (Time Lord of Chaos), a rare example of a custom graphic character on the Odyssey 2. Issuing threats through the Voice's speaker (in an homage to *Space Fury* that probably looked really damn weird to anyone playing this game without the Voice module), Spyruss started chucking tons of heavily-armed assault craft at my one little earthbound cannon. *Attack Of The Time Lord* was, in fact, a great tip of the hat to *Galaga,* incorporating a fleet of enemy ships that would bob, weave, and drop all kinds of lethal weaponry on my head with alarming regularity. I've actually gotten ten levels into this game, at which point it's nearly an exercise in futility – but it's a blast!

Another Challenger Series title, *Smithereens!,* earns the title of the all-time best party game for the Odyssey 2. Two players man catapults on either side of the screen and try to smash each other's castles into dust with well-timed shots. Timing means more than aim in *Smithereens!* (there really is no aim with a catapult, just altitude and dumb luck) and mistimed shots could have undesirable effects, ranging from pulverizing a piece of one's own castle to sending one's projectile into orbit. The joystick really only controlled tension. An understanding of the physics of pinball was helpful for *Smithereens.* I love to drag this game out for guests – it's a howl. The Voice is also at

K.C.'s Krazy Chase

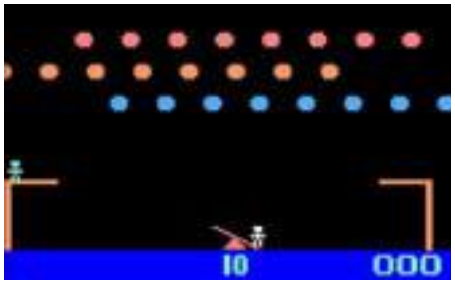
its loopiest, with a voice similar to that of *K.C.'s Krazy Chase* bleating such helpful platitudes as "Come on turkey, hit it!"

North American Phillips finally stuck a single toe into the waters of licensing by getting permission to tie a new *Circus Atari*-style game called *Acrobats* to the Ringling Bros.' Barnum & Bailey Circus. The game became *P.T. Barnum's Acrobats!…*but was, essentially, a barely-disguised copy of *Circus Atari,* right down to the two clowns and the mobile see-saw.



Smithereens

Toward the end of 1983, North American Phillips finally grabbed the first arcade license ever for the Odyssey 2 – and it also turned out to be the only such license sought by the Odyssey's parent company. Phillips acquired the rights to the little-known Stern coin-op *Turtles,* and truth be told, the Odyssey version was actually one of the better cartridges for the console. Reproducing everything down to the intermission screens between levels and even a tiny chunk of the arcade game's attract mode, and revealing a new use for the Voice (playing strangely disjointed but amusing music throughout the game), the Odyssey port of *Turtles* was a gem. And aside from Parker Brothers' ultra-rare Odyssey versions of such games as *Frogger, Popeye,* and *Q*Bert,* it was the only arcade translation made available.



Acrobats

One of the very last Challenger Series games released, the strangely addictive *Killer Bees!* casts the player in the role of a swarm of bees who must sting a room full of robots to death, and lure other bees into the sights of a laser blaster. The other bees – supposedly the killer bees of the game's title – would sting the player's swarm to death, one bee at a time, and when the player ran out of bees, the game was over. Possibly the most original and unusual game ever released under the quasi-prestigious Challenger Series banner, *Killer Bees!* was a surprise; a fast-moving game from a series of fun, but occasionally less than original games inspired by popular coin-ops.

Killer Bees

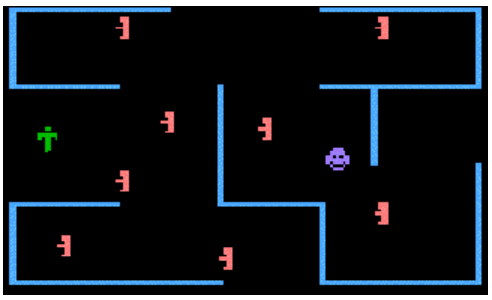
Throughout 1983, Phillips was leaking glimpses of a new console, the Odyssey 2-compatible Odyssey 3 (which also boasted the basis of a more general-purpose computer system), complete with new games such as *Flashpoint* and enhanced-graphics versions of *Pick Axe Pete* and other older titles. But the home video game industry's demise after the disastrous Christmas 1983 shopping season had claimed the Odyssey division before the Odyssey 3 could hit the stores. The Odyssey 2 also went down in flames as a result, with a final Challenger Series cartridge, *Power Lords,* appearing in very limited numbers. A license tied to a series of action figures and comic books, *Power Lords* boasted some of the better original graphics seen in an Odyssey 2 game; for the most part completely breaking away from the console's pre-programmed set of characters. *Power Lords* was a so-so game, but now fetches power-draining prices in eBay auctions, especially for cartridges that still come complete with their original bookcase boxes and instruction manuals.

With the Challenger Series of Odyssey 2 games, it was proven that the Odyssey could handle some more frantic, action-packed, arcade-style game play…and it also proved (sometimes painfully) how close one could come to copying a popular game without getting burned.

The Last Challenge?

Is the Challenger Series truly dead? Perhaps not.

In 1999, programmer John Dondzila, who had already made a name for himself with freshly-programmed cartridges and emulator ROMs for the ColecoVision and Vectrex, released a new game called *Amok!* which certainly lived up to the tradition of the finest Challenger Series games for the Odyssey 2.



Amok!

In *Amok!,* the player's lone gunman dodges through twisty mazes, with killer robots lurking around every corner. Touching the robots, their laser fire, or even the walls results in death – and if the player lingers in one maze too long, a bouncing smiley face emerges from the side of the screen to deliver a happy dose of death.

If you're thinking this sounds a lot like *Berzerk,* you're right on the money. *Berzerk* is one game that the original Challenger Series games never even approached. And even though North American Phillips had a licensing deal with Stern for *Turtles, Berzerk*'s rights had already been sold to Atari (for home console games) and Milton Bradley (for a Vectrex *Berzerk*). Stern sold the rights to the *Berzerk* sequel game, *Frenzy,* to Coleco. But *Amok!* is a good approximation – even if it is much faster than its inspiration!

Amok! features no speech synthesis. Dondzila had originally hoped to use the Voice to provide robotic voices, à la the original *Berzerk,* but eventually abandoned the idea.

The *Amok!* ROM can be downloaded from John Dondzila's web site (http://www.classicgamecreations.com) for play on an Odyssey 2 emulator, but Dondzila also sells very nice, professionally-packaged and personalized *Amok!* cartridges from his web site. I highly recommend the latter – an Odyssey 2 game just isn't an Odyssey 2 game without the real console – and I'm proud to add *Amok!* to my Odyssey 2 game shelf. Even though it's not a real live Challenger Series game, it upholds that proud tradition which made the Odyssey so much fun.

CGM

Bob "Rosha" Harris: Behind the Odyssey

by Earl Green

Fort Wayne, Indiana may not strike a familiar chord within the video game industry, but in the late 1970s, it was an unlikely hotbed of activity supporting what was then considered the most serious competition faced by the Atari VCS. Fort Wayne was home to the original game development group working on new titles for Magnavox's Odyssey 2 console…or at least it was for a little over a year. The original development group was disbanded sometime in 1979, with the bulk of new software for the Odyssey 2 being generated by freelance programmer Ed Averett. Averett's initial involvement with the Odyssey 2 was not as a game designer, but as a sales rep. Working for Intel, Averett worked Magnavox's account, providing the manufacturer with the chips that drove the Odyssey 2; he would later write games for Magnavox on a royalty basis, which was an unusual arrangement in the early 1980s.

Magnavox was bought by the electronics wing of North American Phillips, which itself was the American division of a Dutch-based Electronics company. N. A.P. quickly brought a version of the Odyssey 2 to the Netherlands as the Videopac console, and set up its own game design group there (which was responsible for many of the European-only releases for the Videopac). But N.A.P. also resurrected the U.S. Odyssey 2 design group, basing them in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1981.

It was through this newly-reorganized group that Bob Harris, known to classic gaming fans by the nickname of "RoSHa," continued his then-new career as a video game designer and programmer. "I wanted to do video games, and when I graduated from college in '79, Atari replied to my persistent letters with 'thanks, but we have all the people we need.' I found a non-video-game job at Milton Bradley and, after about six months, convinced them to let me try my hand at them."

Harris found that Milton Bradley understood the game market quite well…but they may have pinned their hopes on the wrong platform. In explaining the situation, Harris reveals that Milton Bradley played an important role in the genesis of the Texas Instruments 99/4A computer. "Milton Bradley had recently had a big hit with Simon, and decided to staff up their own electronic development group around early to mid 1978. They decided to produce a video game machine, and approached Texas Instruments with the design of a custom video chip for the machine. TI was working on a game machine of their own, and a joint venture was formed. Milton Bradley's idea of the machine was a games-only machine with a price point of around $200. I think the Atari 2600 and Odyssey 2 were around $150 at this time, but I'm not positive. TI's idea ended up being a home computer with a higher price point. By the time TI brought the thing to market, as the TI Home Computer, it was $900, plus another $500 for a monitor."

Still, Harris says, Milton Bradley was committed to the TI 99/4A and had already developed several titles, which were released to coincide with the debut of TI's computer circa 1980. Harris worked on two licensed arcade game translations, *Hustle* and *Blasto.* "*Hustle* was a licensed game, presumably from the arcades, but I never saw an arcade version personally. I saw many similar programs on computer screens. I added a lot of variant versions that we all enjoyed at Milton Bradley, but the marketing folks nixed that to keep true to the license." Harris *does,* on the other hand, remember seeing the *Blasto* coin-op. He also remembers that the home version of *Blasto* was the first game he programmed, having taken over that project from another staff programmer.

"Sales of the TI machine were very disappointing, and Milton Bradley backed off on further work for it," Harris says, explaining why the name Milton Bradley doesn't sit next to fellow toy giants Hasbro and Parker Brothers as a video game manufacturer in the minds of many gamers. "At that point, Milton Bradley looked at doing games for the Atari 2600. At the time, we had reverse engineered the 2600, and had a group working on games for it. I believe I saw some 2600 titles at the Milton Bradley booth at the '82 CES, but I'm not certain if they ever took them to market. About the same time, they bought Vectrex (or bought a license to build them), and though I don't remember any specific games, I think they must have released games for it." Ironically, both Milton Bradley *and* rival Parker Brothers were later bought out by Hasbro.

Milton Bradley did, however, take their games seriously. "Milton Bradley was pretty good if you liked games. We would always try out some new game at lunch - a board game or a video game. The corporate atmosphere was pretty stodgy though. Certain building entrances were reserved for folks above a certain grade level, you had assigned parking spots, and the buildings all had a *serious* security staff. My first day at work I got a standard issue memo that said 'the work day ends at 4:45; at 4:40 you will begin to clear your desk of everything except for your telephone and your comptometer.' Before that, I didn't even know what a comptometer *was*!"

Then a curious twist of fate took Bob Harris away from Milton Bradley's young game development group. "One of the guys in the Milton Bradley group, Sam Overton, got hired away to go back to Magnavox/N.A.P. to restart their games group, and he brought me along."

It was a heady time in the video game business. *Pac-Man* Fever was at its peak. The best-selling Atari VCS titles were *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders,* and that machine's hold over the home video game console market was still new. Anything could still happen in this industry. By re-hiring Sam Overton, one of the members of the original Odyssey 2 development group from Fort Wayne, North American Phillips seemed to be taking the challenge of putting their console at the top of the heap seriously.

"Well, they *tried,*" says Bob Harris. "But they didn't understand games. It was not their business. At least they set us up in a separate office 20 miles from the main building and mostly left us alone. As to what it was like...boy, thinking back almost 20 years, it was a lot of work, a lot of hours. It's not that management really pressured us to work a lot of hours, though. The schedules were generally designed for us to be successful - I think we were a little more relaxed in this regard than Atari was."

Working solo, the Odyssey 2 programmers could take anywhere from three to six months on average to complete a new title. As Harris remembers it, "What made for a lot of hours was being perfectionists; trying to get the thing to play just right, spending time playing each other's games, being critical and offering suggestions. You always had plenty of suggestions, but it was still *your* project, so you had the final say-so."

Many Changes In Fortune

The dictionary describes an Odyssey, whether it's Homer's or Magnavox's, as "a long voyage marked by many changes in fortune." It's an apt description for the underdog in the console race of the early eighties. "The programming was difficult, mainly because the processor in the Odyssey 2 was a poor choice for a game system," Harris recalls.

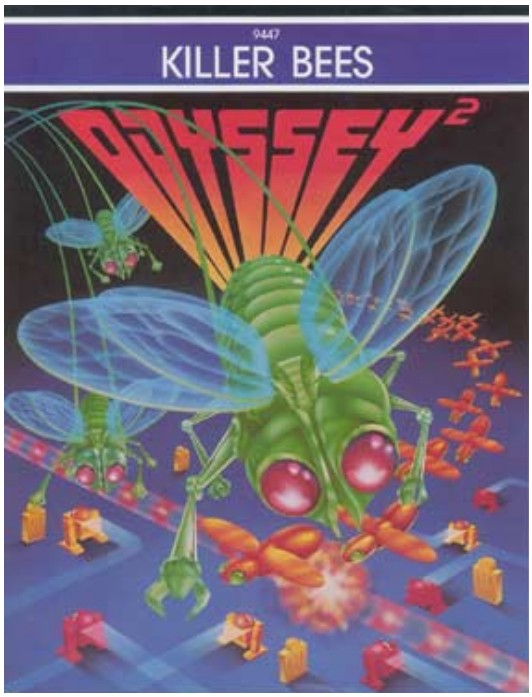
To illustrate this point, one has to examine the innards of the machine. According to Harris, the Odyssey 2 was built around Intel's 8048 chip and a custom video chip, which Intel created specifically for Magnavox's machine. "Contrast this with the Atari 2600, which had a 6502," Harris says. [The 6502 is the same chip that former Atari employees Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak used as the central processor of the Apple II computer.] "Compounding the problem was that our 8048 was only able to execute about 15 instructions during one video line, whereas the 6502 was executing about twice that many. Further, the 2600's video chip was simpler and more controllable. This initial batch of 2600 games Atari sent out was pretty simple, mostly *Pong*-like with a few simple elements on a black background. The Activision people started doing a lot more with that machine by changing graphical elements *during* the video line - doing things that the chip designer never imagined."

But couldn't the Odyssey 2 compete graphically? After all, Atari's games were plagued by a flicker caused by too many sprites (animated characters) on the screen at the same time. The Odyssey 2 rarely, if ever, displayed such problems with its graphics.

"The Odyssey 2 had a more complex graphics chip. The chip did more *for* you, but it could only do those things it was designed for, and nothing more," Harris points out. The payoff for the chip's power came in the form of the Odyssey's infamous fixed characters set - alphanumeric characters, planets, and even men looked identical in the vast majority of games. "From memory, the chip had character patterns stored in ROM, for, must've been 48 or 64 8x8 character patterns. You had 26 uppercase, 10 digits, two patterns each of a man walking left and right; that would be forty. I forget the others. It also had 12 objects that would display any of those characters, positioned independently, and in any of 16 different colors," Harris recalls, though he also admits that the machine may have been limited to 8 colors. "There were four 8x8 single color sprites, grid segments for making mazes, and a background color."

Harris remembers that the Odyssey 2 design team began a quest almost immediately to find different ways to use these limited capabilities. And, taking a cue from Activision, they searched for solutions that no one had thought of. "You could try to reuse objects on different lines - use an object near the top of the screen, then change its position to the bottom so it would appear twice. This was pretty hard to do successfully, for a number of reasons. First, the 8048 was pretty slow; second, the processor clock and video clock didn't have an integral relationship, and only returned to the same phase relationship every four pictures.

"I also experimented with using, say, 6 objects to make 7, by choosing one not to display on each frame. I think you saw a lot of flickery things in other games where they'd use one object to make two on alternating frames. That didn't look good, but an object missing only one out of every 6 frames didn't look too bad. It almost looked like it had an energy pulse. In *Killer Bees* I was trying to use this to make more robots, but it ended up that I ran out of other resources first."



Harris recalls that the struggle to create characters other than the presets built into the video chip resulted in shamelessly exploiting bugs. "There was a flaw in the video chip that allowed you to use any bottom segment of any of the characters. Thus, the *Killer Bees* robots used the legs from the walking figures, and half-8's for the helmets. I made a little demo cartridge that allowed you to play around with those to see what the combinations would look like. The bug zapper in *Killer Bees* was done, if I remember correctly, by changing the background color part way down the screen, then changing it back 10 lines later. I think I placed some objects over the left and right ends to hide some glitches that went along with that."

Harris's *Killer Bees* also included a unique and colorful title screen, which was atypical compared to the bland "Select Game" screen that greeted the players of most of the Odyssey 2's games. "The front screen of *Killer Bees* used the same kind of thing, changing the background color in a rainbow pattern. That was just an experiment to see if we could do anything useful like that. The answer was generally 'no,' but that effect was attractive enough to put in the cartridge."

Harris drives the final nail in the coffin of the Odyssey's under-powered processor: "Which reminds me, the 8048 only had something like 64 bytes of RAM, and that was *it!* And then ColecoVision came out with the Z80 and a nice video chip. What's sad is that the same video chip had been in the TI Home Computer, introduced circa 1980. Other people *could* have made the Coleco system earlier - just no one *did*."

Voice Enhanced Bees!

1982 saw the most significant - well, truthfully, the *only* - attempt to enhance the technology of the Odyssey 2. Promoted heavily on TV and in print advertisements, the Voice of Odyssey 2 promised to enhance Odyssey games with helpful, human-sounding synthesized speech. What would have been helpful to the programming group in Knoxville was some idea of how many of the shiny add-on modules had been sold.

"The problem with the voice thing was that you couldn't use it as an integral part of play, since most people didn't have one. And it was difficult to get an accurate reading of whether the thing was out there or not. So for the most part, I think we all considered it a nuisance," Harris remembers. But ironically, one of the first games to which the Voice was essential landed in his lap - as Harris's first assignment as a full-time member of the game design team.

"*Nimble Numbers NED* was my first game for Odyssey, and they wanted an educational line for the Voice," Harris says of the simple game, which supposedly helped to teach math skills. "I was never very pleased with this game. I wanted to title it 'Math Potatoes,' but marketing wanted to have NED and SID form an educational line. SID was '*SID the Spellbinder*,' by Sam Overton, which was a much better game than NED by far."

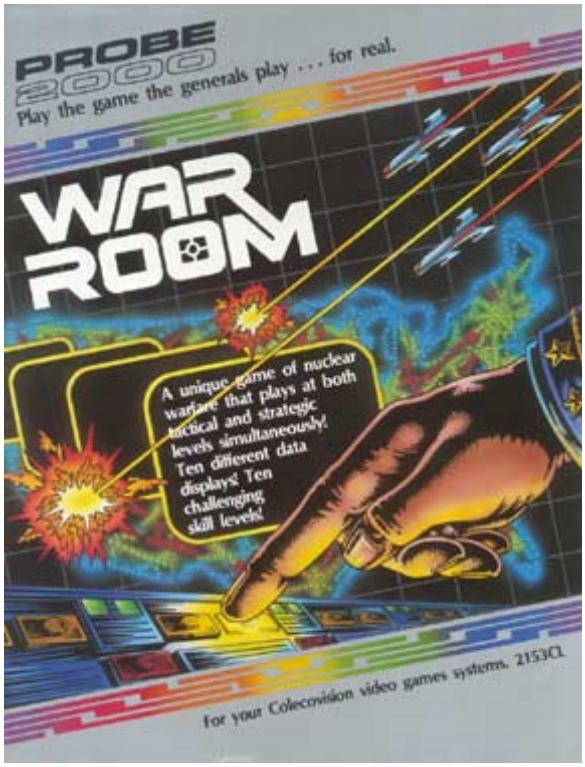
Harris also pushed the envelope of the Odyssey 2's processor once again by creating an innovation for *Type & Tell,* a cartridge which was included with every Voice module. Acting as something of a glorified Speak & Spell - in a robotic voice which one of the video game magazines of the time described as "Darth Vader on quaaludes" - *Type & Tell* presented users with a blank grid. Using the Odyssey's keyboard, users could tell the Voice of Odyssey 2 what to say…and occasionally, the machine got it right (though phonetic spelling quickly became necessary for most applications). "I am a baby doggy," for example, would be mangled into "I am a babby dodgey" unless it was misspelled in just the right way. But don't

blame Harris for *Type & Tell*'s disjointed speech. "I only contributed some technical capabilities to this one. Prior to this cartridge, you generally didn't see more than twenty or so characters on an Odyssey screen. I figured out how to get 96 characters up there."

But the Voice managed to sound much better in other games, which raised the question of its split personality. "The robot-like voice was done completely with phoneme-based text-to-speech. The other voice was pre-canned words. There were also a couple of sound effects in there."

In fact, it was an odd sound effect from the Voice that inspired Bob Harris to create his best game for the Odyssey 2, *Killer Bees.* "The idea for *Killer Bees* came from one of the sounds in the Voice module. It was supposed to sound like a "boing," but actually sounded like buzzing bees. If you had a Voice module, you heard this sound at the start of an attack wave, as your swarm forms, I think."

The Challenger Series from which *Killer Bees* sprang was notorious for basing its games on familiar arcade staples, but making them different enough to avoid legal trouble (with the exception of Ed Averett's *K.C. Munchkin,* which drew an Atari look-and-feel lawsuit). But was *Killer Bees* designed to be similar to a coin-op title? "Everything was trying to duplicate the feel of the arcade game *Centipede.* I definitely wanted something fast paced. A good player can polish off some of the early *Killer Bees* waves in a few seconds. One of the things I liked in *Centipede* was that a smart player could make use of the patterned behavior of the centipede to force it into a channel of mushrooms and pick it off easily. The corresponding concept in *Killer Bees* was the predictable behavior of the robots. A robot either always turned left, or he always turned right. You could take advantage of this by killing a robot or two in the right place, which forced another robot into a tight loop, making it easier to kill. Or at least that was my theory. I'm not sure if any players ever caught on to that. Similarly, I don't know if *War Room* players caught on to the fact that they can *produce* laser fuel."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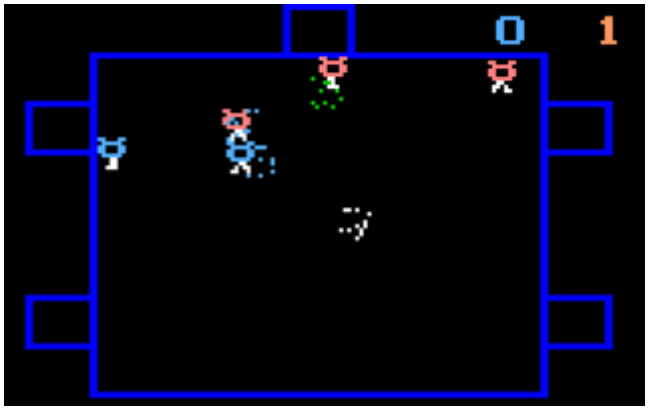
But not everyone, it seems, "got" *Killer Bees.* "One experimental thing I did was also probably lost on players," Harris admits. "At least I know that when Bob (Burt?) Hochberg called (he was doing a review of it for Games Magazine), he hadn't noticed it. Most people think you only have one life in *Killer Bees,* that as soon as the bad swarm touches you, you're dead, game over. That's not true, though. You have twelve bees in your swarm at the start of each wave, and you lose bees while you are in contact with a bad swarm. So if you are only in contact briefly, you'll lose a couple bees. If you sit there and let them swarm over you, I think you lose your whole swarm in about a half second. I think it's actually possible to fly right through a bad swarm and not lose all your bees."

And if you thought *Nimble Numbers NED* was the only educational game Harris programmed for the Odyssey 2, think again – *Killer Bees* nearly contained a couple of interesting lessons in math. "At the end of a round, you get a bonus for each bee you have left. And each time you make it through a wave without losing any bees, the bonus multiplier increases. This was something I borrowed from the classic pinball machines. Through most of the development, both the bonus level and the wave were displayed as two letters - wave 1 = letter A, wave 26 = letter Z. So if you had a perfect game up to level 26, you'd see ZZ, but if you had a few waves where you lost some bees, you might see something like ZT. The vice president over our group thought that was "teaching people base 26," and I was forced to change it. So the released version has two digits for the attack wave, and you have to figure out how you're doing on the bonus."

"By the way, that's why there are only 26 waves in *Killer Bees,*" Harris reveals. "After wave 26, it goes back to wave 20. Another experiment was a good lesson in psychology. I have always hated games in which every scoring action yields multiples of thousands or millions. The last three digits were always zero, so it just seemed worthless to me. During much of the *Killer Bees* project, the score was listed as X.XXX. In other words, you scored in increments of thousandths of a point. While it makes no mathematical difference, there was something not at all satisfying about getting to the end of the game and saying 'Yeah! I scored 3!' So I took out the decimal point. It was a humbling realization."

The traditional process of the Odyssey designers playing and offering suggestions on each other's games yielded some valuable additions to *Killer Bees* as well. "The portals at the screen edge, where the bad swarms form, was Rex [Battenberg]'s idea, I think. Or maybe it was a result of a bad experience he had playing an early version. I think the swarms just appeared in the portal and immediately came out, and this nailed Rex's swarm and he swore several times at the top of his lungs. His point was he didn't have any chance to avoid them. My counterpoint was that you shouldn't sit near those portals! But after a while, I realized it'd be better if the swarm sat in the portal for a while so you'd have a chance to see it. The bug zapper was Sam Overton's idea, and I think it helped the game. When there are no other sound effects going on, there's sort of a heartbeat. That was the VP's idea. He insisted that the main reason *Pac-Man* was successful was the repetitive sound. He might be right, but the heartbeat in *Killer Bees* would have been more useful if I had more than one voice."

Next Month: Part 2 of Earl Green's interview with Bob Harris.



Killer Bees

ATARI Arcade Hits 1

Review by Shaun Conlin

In the modern world of the hyper-accelerated push of plenty-o-polygons, it's nice to sit back with these six old gems like long lost friends. Flawed and frivolous as they may be, they're warmly welcome.

Those looking for an authentic blast-from-the-past need look no further than Atari Arcade Hits 1. Those wanting a wee history lesson or see just how far gaming has come over the last decade or two will be equally fulfilled by this package deal from Hasbro Interactive.

Six Atari coin-op games have been ported into the PC packet, and the emulation is uncanny- as in very, very well done.

Being someone who enjoys visiting his roots, I couldn't boot up Atari's Asteroids fast enough. Wow! I've never seen vector beam so authentically represented. On top of that, there's even a mode that overlays the original cabinet graphics around the edge of the screen, complete with the little blinking LED buttons for 1-player and 2-player start. A further optional enhancement adds some spacey scenery to the background. Nothing too obtrusive, just a little more pleasant than the flat black vectorbeam screen. And I almost cackled with excitement when the old, two-tone "Doump Doomp" sound effect came pulsing out of my Desktop Theatre subwoofer. Thanks Creative Labs.

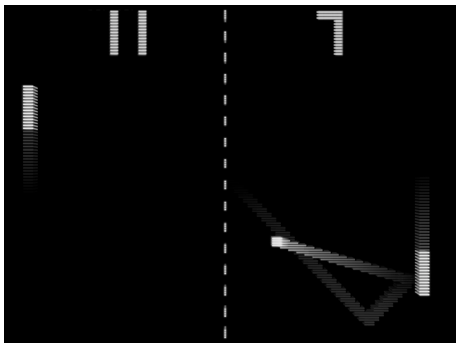
Staying true to genuineness, the 10th high score for Asteroids will cut off one character for the otherwise 3-character name, a flaw they kept from the original coin-op version. Cheeky.

Since a keyboard can be easily set up to emulate the simple 5-button action for the original arcade hit, this version of Asteroids is darn-near perfect in its representation. Unfortunately, the original Asteroids was slightly flawed, or at least un-polished, with its sluggish ship control and random element courtesy of the stupid hyperspace button. The sequel, Asteroids Deluxe, is my all time favorite and the original Asteroids doesn't even rank in my book, except maybe as foot note kudos to an original game that exemplified pure, raw, unrelenting gameplay.

I can only hope that an Asteroids Deluxe port comes out in a future package…

The other five games found in Arcade Hits are just as faithfully translated, save for one nagging issue: Control.

Missile Command and Centipede, for example, were originally played with



a track-ball and though they play here well enough with the mouse as to be considered excellent ports, they aren't close enough to the original style of gameplay to be considered uncanny; instead, merely close imitations. You can go out and purchase yourself a track-ball peripheral, but I don't think these two games alone make it worth the effort or the money. I might have a prejudice on that count as I always sucked at Missile Command…

The remaining three games, Pong, Super Breakout, and Tempest are each brilliantly translated and warmly welcome in this pack; Pong most of all as the Granddaddy of video games in all its B&W, two-ping-sound glory (you can "enhance" Pong to color, but that seems sacrilegious). Each of these games, however, were originally played with a paddle and nothing short of purchasing such a peripheral makes these ports wholly worthwhile. It's like driving a car with a typewriter instead of a steering wheel. Let's face it, left and right on a keyboard or joystick only vaguely emulates clockwise and counter-clockwise motion. One's hand-eye coordination is hampered by that additional thought process, which really starts to foul up genuine reflex when the heat cranks up and timing is crucial. It breaks up the flow-control and leaves very little room for finesse- especially when trying to throw some English into Pong or Breakout. These games are so pure otherwise that the one flaw really glares.

A final, notable flaw can been found in Super Breakout, which has only 3 levels. Lame!

All said and done, however, I'll still recommend Atari's Arcade Hits 1 simply for its long-lost-friends appeal. I mean, the old sound effects alone are worth the purchase price, which is thankfully cheap.

Also, the CD-ROM contains desktop themes from each game, complete with cheesy retro sounds. Warms my heart. Also on the CD-ROM are dozens of pictures, promotional ads and flyers, posters, and even box art from some of the first home versions on the Atari 2600 and 5200. Numerous video clips of Atari founder Nolan Bushnell are in there too. Watching the "Father of Video Games" reminisce about those pioneering days is a must-see for any game fan of any age. It's good stuff. Informative and somehow exciting.

The instruction booklet also contains a "Retro Recap" for each game, in case you weren't really there. When Tempest first came out in 1980, for example, John Lennon and Jimmy Durante died, Ronald Reagan became the 40th president and yours truly started the 8th grade (entered kindergarten when Pong came out!). Ok, I'm not really mentioned in the booklet, but the brief history lesson stuff is a very cool touch.

There's also a link for world-wide high scores on each game where I'm sure I'll see fogies like myself, and maybe even a few old friends if I can remember their 3-character names…

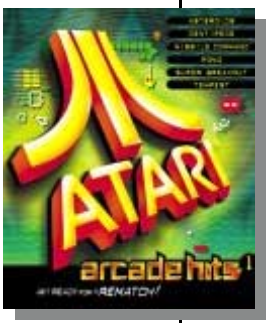
My Score:
8/10

Shaun Conlin, The GameGeek
Syndicated Newspaper Games Columnist at www.gamegeek.ca
and Associate Editor at The Electric Playground www.elecplay.com

This column first appeared on The Electric Playground
www.elecplay.com

CGM

Genre: Action
Platform: Win95/98
Developer: Digital Eclipse
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Players: 2
Price: $10 US
ESRB Rating: Everyone



RAIDERS OF THE LOST "J" Contest

Help Us Find the Lost Easter Egg!

After our Howard Scott Warshaw article was published last issue, we received a letter from an alert reader, Scott Stilphen. Scott wanted to know if we knew the whereabouts of a "strange object" hiding in "Raiders of the Lost Ark" for the Atari 2600. He directed us to a screenshot of Raiders, which was printed in the November 1982 issue of Electronic Games Magazine (shown at right). Sure enough, the screenshot shows Indy in the Valley of Poison next to a blue block with the letter "J" inside.

"Hmmmm….," we thought.

Donning our best Fedoras, we embarked on a mission to determinine the origin of the "Lost J." Our first stop was to the source, himself, Mr. Howard Scott Warshaw.

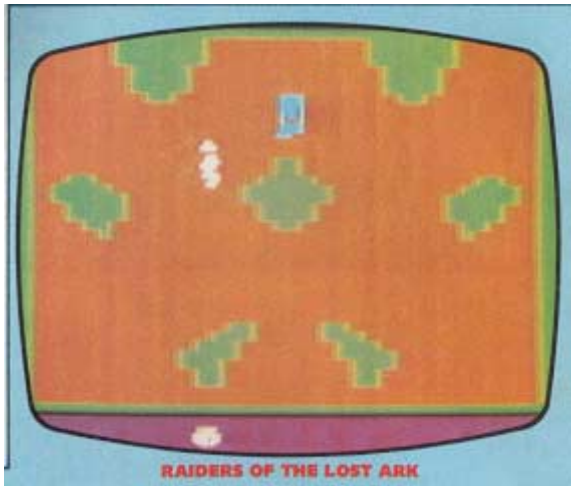
After threatening him with our whips, Mr. Warshaw told us: "If you'll notice the 'J' shape in this graphic, you will see that it is a signature by my graphic artist, Jerome Domurat. I wasn't the only one with Easter Eggs in my games! A most opportune screen shot indeed."

Naturally we asked him, "So, how can we find it?"

He replied, "I think it is findable, but I honestly don't remember exactly how. It's been a long time." Then he threw "E.T." cartridges at our heads until we left.

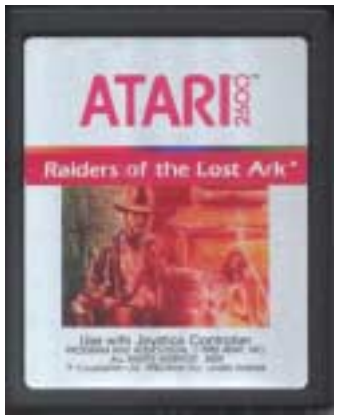
Just when we felt we hit a dead end, Jerome Domurat himself contacted us. He told us, "It's been a number of years since that was done. I can't remember how it was invoked. I do think it was in the finished cartridge since there was typically only one version of the code."

So, that's it! We're at our dead end. Now we're looking to you to help us find the "Lost J."



Prizes

- One Year Subscription to Classic Gamer Magazine
- Midway Classics 2 (PC Version)
- "Once Upon Atari" Video, Autographed by Howard Scott Warshaw
- Bragging Rights



How to Enter:

The first person to e-mail their verifiable solution (that works!) to us will receive a bevy of prizes. Send to: cav@classicgamer.com

Rules

1. Only e-mails with the solution will be accepted.
2. No contacting Howard Scott Warshaw or Jerome Domurat. We've already squeezed enough info from them.
3. No hair pulling.

JAGUAR STRAIGHT FROM THE CAT'S MOUTH

by Carl Forhan

Y2K is barely a spec of dust in the collective public eye, yet new Atari products for orphaned platforms roll on and on to a wave of grateful Atari fans. What is it about Atari that sparks such determination in its fans to survive against all odds? Who would have thought we'd still be pondering new releases for the Lynx and Jaguar years after official support grounded to a halt? Why do I have a love for rhetorical questions? Never mind that; it's the games that matter. And games are exactly what Atari fans have received this year.

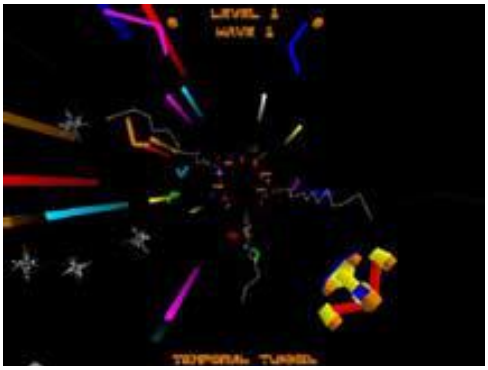
JUGS Screenshot

Latest on the Jaguar's plate are a pair of interesting devices. The first is **JUGS** ("Jaguar Unmodified Game Server"), a combination of a hidden feature in the **BattleSphere** cartridge and some add-on software with cable for your PC. Basically, JUGS allows you to download RAM-only games and demos to your Atari Jaguar. All you have to do is insert your BattleSphere cartridge, hook up the cable, run the software, and voila! Check out www.buyjugs.com for more details.

Remnant

The second device, brought to you by Songbird, is a **Rapid Fire Controller**. This is a regular 18-button controller modified with two low-profile pushbuttons on the bottom of the controller. These buttons enable rapid fire on the A and/or B buttons, at selectable rates of 5, 10, 15, or 20 pulses per second. Tiny LEDs next to the A and B buttons indicate the relative speed. If you've been frustrated by **Zero 5** or **Raiden** or the like because your thumb wears out after, oh, the first 60 seconds of playing, this is exactly what you need. Focus on the gameplay, not thumb stamina.

Even more amazing is the continued level of Lynx support this year. Remnant, a full-freedom 3D space shooter, was released at CGE2K as reported in the Summer 2000 issue of CGM. **Crystal Mines 2: Buried Treasure**, Windows-based software that allows you to design and download new levels for CM2 to your Lynx, was also released at the same show. But wait -- we're not done yet! Songbird has announced that another cool game, **Championship Rally**, will be available in time for Christmas. This is a rally-style overhead racing game with TONS of options. You want tracks? Try Desert, Alaska, Valley, and more! You want options? How about head-to-head play via comlynx, selectable car colors and handling, single race or tournament play, a password entry screen, shortcuts and cheats, and so much more. This is one game you won't want to miss.



Gorf 2k

So, where does that leave us for the future? Fear not, Atari fans. **Gorf Pluz** and **Gorf 2K** by Krunch Software are still being actively developed for the Jaguar, not to mention several lower-profile games. Plus there's always the possibility that additional unreleased games will fall into Songbird's lap (believe me, I WISH it was that easy) in the near future. Lynx development is also encouraging right now, with games like **Stardreamer**, **Distant Lands**, and **Cybervirus** still looking strong into next year. I seriously expect some relatively big announcements in the next 6 months for both platforms... but I'll save that for a future issue. :-)

For ordering information on all Songbird products, please visit the Songbird web page at: http://songbird.atari.net.

CGM

Carl Forhan apparently enjoys being chained to a computer, as he has been feverishly working for the past two years on publishing new software for the Atari Jaguar and Lynx platforms under the Songbird Productions label. This is in addition to holding down an engineering job and working as a volunteer youth pastor.

The Atarian Christmas 2000 Checklist

Jaguar:

[ ] BattleSphere
[ ] Hyper Force
[ ] JUGS
[ ] Protector
[ ] Rapid Fire Controller
[ ] Skyhammer
[ ] Soccer Kid

Lynx:

[ ] Championship Rally
[ ] Crystal Mines II: Buried Treasure
[ ] Lynx Game Wallet
[ ] Lynx/PC serial cable
[ ] Othello
[ ] Remnant: Planar Wars 3D

I've heard it said that some of the easiest games to program for any game system are those that fall into a few narrow categories: shoot-'em-ups, paddle games, and platformers. Though still difficult to design, create, and program a homebrewed game, at least you have the comfort of looking at what's been done before you begin. It's convenient to examine what's worked and what hasn't.

But what of those creations that define new genres of homebrew programming?

This issue's column takes one more look at the Atari 2600 and some of the recent releases that DON'T fall into any easily definable genre. Rather than settle for what's been done in the past, these programmers tried - and succeeded - in bringing something new and never-before-seen to the classic system.

Stella Sketch

By Bob Colbert
Platform: Atari 2600
Genre: Drawing program
Released: 1997

Who needs paper and pencil when you have this bit of fun from Bob Colbert, best known for other efforts like the puzzle game Okie Dokie (reviewed last issue).

Stella Sketch was designed and released by Bob on cassette tape for use with the Starpath Supercharger. Once loaded into your system, Stella Sketch turned your Atari into an easy-to-use easel! Using either a joystick, Atari or Amiga mouse, or a pair of Indy 500 driving paddles, Stella Sketch allowed you to create your own masterpieces on the TV screen. You use the selected controller to move an on-screen cursor, which draws a line wherever it goes. (Though one game variation allows you to use the button to "pick up" and "drop" the point so you don't leave a continuous line.) Pushing the Reset button causes the game screen to "shake," effectively erasing your latest drawing.

Using a clever bit of bankswitching, you can sit and doodle all over the screen and your drawing will remain there until you either erase it or turn off the system. It's easiest to draw with the joystick or mouse, and it takes a bit of practice to draw anything with the driving paddles, which are still spotty at best. However, using the driving paddles is a real hoot and really gives the feel of playing with the classic red plastic children's drawing toy.

Which, sadly, brings us to why this program is no longer being distributed.

Stella Sketch is no longer available after Ohio Arts, manufacturer of the Etch-a-Sketch, demanded it no longer be distributed, claiming that the program was too close to infringing on the copyright of the original. You may be able to find the BIN floating around on the Web and Bob has said that he may re-release the program in the future after a bit of re-programming.

Bob Colbert has a website at: http://members.home.com/rcolbert1/

Video Time Machine

by Chris Cracknell
Platform: Atari 2600
Genre: Real-time clock application
Released: 1999

Look at your game system. It's just sitting there, playing games. Well, it's time to get serious! Time to put that bit of frivolity to work!

Chris Cracknell has designed an Atari program that turns your 2600 into a real-time clock! That's right, plug this into your system and turn your television set into the biggest digital clock in the house.

The program keeps accurate time and shows it in either a 12-hour or 24-hour military time display. The time has a scrolling rainbow effect that's very interesting to look at.

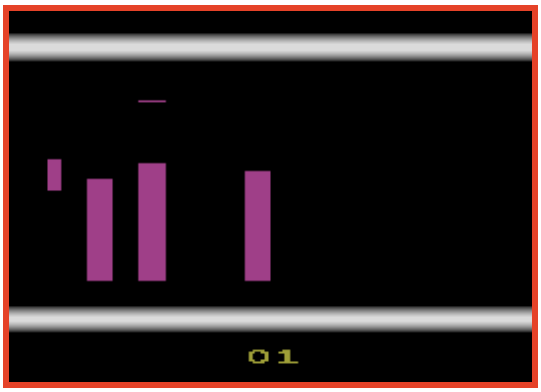
What makes this program even more fascinating is the classic Atari characters that race along the top and bottom of the screen. Every 10 minutes, the upper characters change and the bottom ones change on the hour. Mr. Do may walk across and the Space Invaders will march as Times Keeps On Slippin'. Setting the clock is simple enough by using the joystick.

Since there's not much point in having it running 24-hours a day (can't play any games and the bills would be murder), I've found the best use of this cart is to have it running at parties or any other social gathering. It's a sure show stopper and it beats having everyone walk into the kitchen for a glance at the clock over the stove. Besides, my kitchen clock doesn't feature Ms. Pac-Man at 11:00 p.m.!

Chris Cracknell has a website at: *www.hwcn.org/~ad329/crab.htm.*

Pressure Gauge by John K. Harvey

Platform: Atari 2600
Genre: Reflex/reaction game
Released: 1999



How fast can you move? How accurate are you when the pressure's on? Are you certain? Plug this cart into your Atari and test yourself!

John Harvey's Pressure Gauge will be the judge of how fast you can hit a specified target in a quickly-dwindling time period. The screen itself is simple - only three bars. The first bar rises to the top of the screen, and you have to hit the joystick button when the top of the bar is within a "range" marked on the far left of the screen. If you're fast enough and accurate enough, the second bar shown on the screen will go up a bit as a reward. If you miss the target, the second bar will drop back down a bit. The object is to get your "scoring bar" to the top of the screen before the third and final bar - the timer - ticks down from the top of the screen to the bottom.

Each time you get the scoring bar to the top of the screen, you begin a new, and more challenging round. The target range may begin to randomly shift or blink about the edge, making it harder to hit. Your rising bar may zip with blinding speed, causing you to constantly overshoot the range. The bar may even disappear for short periods, necessitating a blind guess.

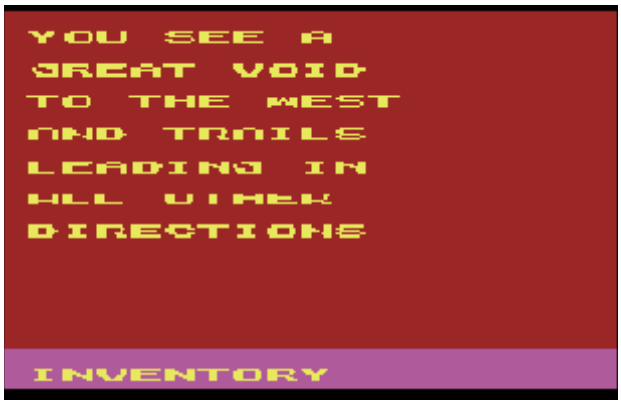
The game is simple enough, requiring only the joystick button to play. However, in the upper levels, your eyes will be bugging out of your head as you try to hit the bouncing, disappearing target.

There's a nice little title screen when the game begins, and although the game screen is pretty simple and there is no scoring to speak of except for "how many levels can you survive," this game is effectively addictive as you try one more time to beat your last score. Anyone who's ever spent the afternoon playing "Flinch" or "Slap Hands" will want to try their reflexes on this. Your soon-to-be-frazzled nerves will thank you for the workout.

John K. Harvey has a website at: *www.cs.wisc.edu/~harvey/*

Dark Mage by Greg Troutman

Platform: Atari 2600
Genre: Text adventure
Released: 1997



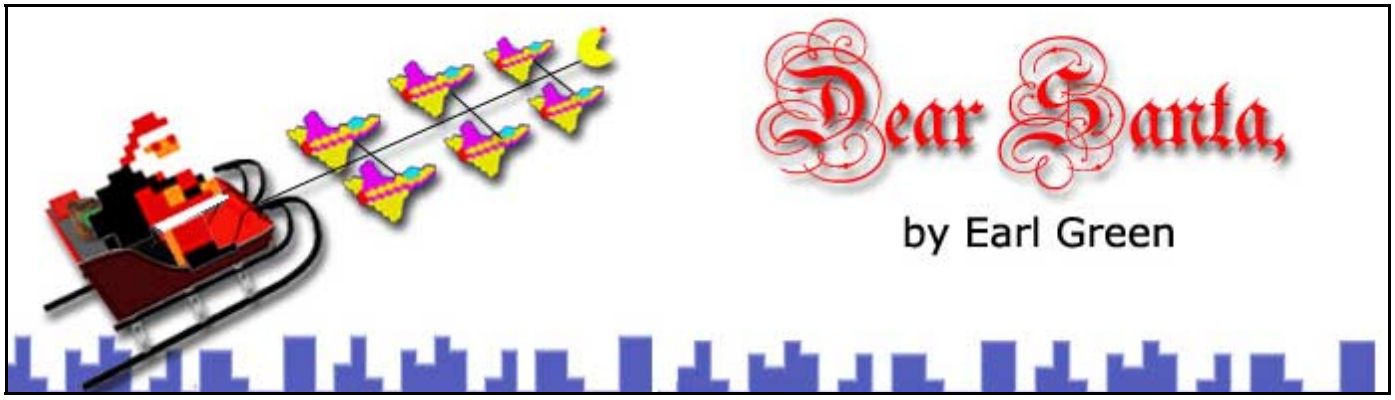
Yes indeed, years after fantasy games like Adventure and Crypts of Chaos have come and gone, Greg Troutman finally brings the realm of TEXT adventures to the Atari! Get ready for an Infocom/Scott Adams flashback you never thought you'd see!

You're placed in the role of a jester who's been ousted from his home kingdom for accidentally losing the King's beloved black rose. To get back into His Majesty's good graces and to be allowed back into the kingdom, you'd better find a replacement! Wander over a colorful countryside, meeting and interacting with the strange inhabitants, collecting and using items, as you fight to get back home!

The game is played with a joystick. The upper screen tells you what you see with each move and the bar at the bottom of the screen lists the commands at your disposal. Moving the joystick up, down, left, and right allows you to move north, south, west, and east, respectively. Pushing the button brings up another menu of commands including Look, Talk, Give, Take, and Inventory.

Of course the game is pretty simple to play, but winning takes a bit more thinking than is usually seen in Atari games! It's a blast to actually try to solve the puzzles to situations you face. The troll won't let you cross the bridge, eh? What can you do to convince him? What is the snake trying to say to you? And what's this hammer for anyway? Dark Mage comes in two versions; a 4K "mini-version" and an 8K "director's cut," with more locations, items, and characters to meet. Greg has broken new ground with this quest and I'd love to see more text games like this one in the future.

These homebrews (excluding Stella Sketch) are currently available on cartridge from Randy Crihfield at Hozer Video Games, P.O. Box 1332, Pepperell, MA 01463. Check out www.netway.com/~hozervideo/index.html for catalog and further details.



Dear Santa,

I'm about to work on my classic gaming Christmas list, and I'm hoping your elves can bust some heads at the major game publishers and make this stuff happen, because it's long overdue. You see, Namco and Williams and Konami and Midway have all polished off their old chestnuts for the PlayStation, Dreamcast, N64, Game Boy, and PC, and Hasbro's doing a lot to help out too. But there are so many more manufacturers who need to do the same! So, Santa, here's my wish list. Can we make this work? Huh?

Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Stern Collection. In an ideal world, this lovely selection of classic arcade emulations would include *Berzerk* and *Frenzy* (complete with speech synthesis), *Bagman* (and maybe *Super Bagman* too), *Turtles, Tutankham, Amidar,* and *Strategy X.* Since *Berzerk* is the cretaceous crustacean forebear of such 3-D maze shooters as *Doom* and *Duke Nukem,* it is long overdue that recognition.

Nichibutsu Arcade Hits. This little-known manufacturer turned out some great stuff! Everyone remembers *Crazy Climber, Seicross,* and *Moon Cresta,* don't they? Or the obscure sequel *Crazy Climber II*?

Amidar

Universal Arcade Hits. Universal unleashed some of the funkiest and most fun games to hit the arcades in the early 1980's. A Universal collection would probably include *Mr. Do, Mr. Do's Castle* and *Do Run Run!* (and possibly *Mr. Do's Wild Ride* as well), along with *Ladybug, Snap Jack,* and *Cosmic Avenger*.

Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Midway Collection II. Midway's vaults are lined with forgotten hits and cult classics. They came real close to releasing one with *Gorf* and *Wizard of Wor,* but backed out at the last minute. Why not a compilation featuring those titles, along with *Kickman, Domino Man, Kozmik Krooz'r, Solar Fox, Omega Race,* and, if they were willing to shell out the dough for the rights, *Tron, Discs of Tron,* and *Journey*? It'd be total bliss…but I'm not holding my breath.

Kick Man

The Taito Treasury. Taito is responsible for so many incredibly memorable games that it hurts to think that they haven't been re-released. Who among us wouldn't shell out a few dead presidents for such classics as *Qix, Phoenix, Jungle Hunt, Elevator Action, Stratovox, Front Line, Colony 7, Arkanoid, Zoo Keeper,* and – lest we forget where Bally/Midway licensed it from – the original *Space Invaders*?

Excavating Exidy. A collection of Exidy classics, including *Mouse Trap, Pepper II, Starfire, Venture,* and *Targ*.

Sega Classics. Probably limited only to the Dreamcast, this compilation would unearth long-lost favorites such as *Zaxxon, Pengo, Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom, Congo Bongo, Carnival, Turbo, Space Odyssey, Tac-Scan, Space Fury,* and more.

Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Atari Collection III. By jumping from the era of *Tempest* and *Missile Command* straight into latter-day titles like *Paperboy* and *Gauntlet,* Midway's AGH series skipped a huge number of very memorable Atari titles. This collection would

redress the balance by emulating *Kangaroo, Food Fight, Arabian, I Robot,* and *Major Havoc*.

SNK's Last Gasp. Before SNK throws in the towel in the U.S. just because we all failed to buy into the Neo Geo Pocket, they could at least give us a collection of their arcade classics, including *Vanguard, Warp Warp,* and *Fantasy* (my all-time favorite arcade game). With my luck, I'd have to get a Neo Geo Pocket just to play this collection…

The Mario Files. Probably proprietary to the Nintendo 64 or the upcoming Dolphin console, this collection would at long last bring home perfect emulations of such Nintendo games as *Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr., Donkey Kong 3,* the original *Mario Bros., Popeye,* and *Space Firebird*.

Namco Museum, Volume 6. Come back, Namco! Don't we need a wing of the museum devoted to *Jr. Pac-Man, Dig Dug II, Hopping Mappy, Professor Pac-Man,* and maybe even a video pinball "emulation" of the otherwise un-emulatable *Baby Pac-Man*? We know that the latter game was more Bally/Midway's train wreck than yours, but it'd still be fun to take another crack at it.

Arcade's Greatest Hits: The *Other* Williams Collection. Not so fast, Midway – Williams Electronics gave us more than just a half-dozen great games. Whatever happened to *Make Trax* and *Motorace USA,* among others?

Laserama! No, not a light show at a Pink Floyd concert, but a compilation of laserdisc games translated to DVD format for use on the PlayStation 2 (which is DVD-capable). *Dragon's Lair, Dragon's Lair II,* and *Space Ace* have already been turned into normal DVDs, so why not *Interstellar Laser Fantasy, Cliff Hanger, Bega's Battle,* and so on?

Zaxxon

Classic Games From The Odyssey2. Another Activision archive of 30 forgotten gems from my all-time favorite console, including *K.C. Munchkin, K.C.'s Krazy Chase* (with Voice emulation!), *Pick Axe Pete, Killer Bees, Attack of the Timelord, UFO, Alien Invaders Plus, Quest For The Rings* (without that cumbersome game board!), *Computer Golf, Baseball!* and many more. Sure, I'd miss punching my name in on the membrane keyboard, but that's why I keep a real live working Odyssey2 in my game cabinet. This one would be for all the folks who thought the Odyssey never had a decent game made for it.

Popeye

As you can see, Santa, there are a lot of games just waiting to be released, if not begging. MAME is okay, but it doesn't always get the sound right, and the speed isn't always right, and you sure as heck can't play full-motion video laserdisc games on MAME. The days of classic gaming are coming back…and hey, even if the video game publishers can't get it in gear to produce any of the above in time for Christmas 2000, maybe they could let this letter be their guide as they consider what to resurrect next. If even three or four of the above titles come true in the next year, I promise I'll be real good…and, with a little PlayStation practice time, I might even work my way up to "better than good!"

P.S. – I was just kidding about having the elves bust heads, Santa.

Motorace USA

CGM

HEAD 'EM OFF AT THE PAST:

STAR TREK STRATEGIC OPERATIONS SIMULATOR VS. STAR TREK: INVASION

BY EARL "TRIBBLE" GREEN

THEN

Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator (Sega, 1983)
Platforms: **coin-op, Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Vectrex**

Actually, to say that Sega originated the Star Trek game would be a disservice to years worth of work by budding programmers. These programmers infringed on Paramount's copyrights back in the days when the studio conveniently looked the other way, happy to have anyone *remember* Star Trek, as opposed to the studio's spree of web site shutdowns in the 1990s. Sega's vector arcade game combined the resource management elements of the age-old Star Trek computer game with some elements of a first-person shooter…make that only a *few* elements. The coin-op drew heavily upon the look of the "Kobayashi Maru" simulator depicted in the second Trek flick, which – for the time – was really cool. (Actually, now that I think about it, it still is.) The object of the game is simple: defend Federation starbases and wipe out those pesky Klingons, all while closely monitoring your phaser, shield, and warp engine energy levels. Sound easy? It wasn't! Later levels had whole fleets of Klingons occupying the same sector of space as the *Enterprise,* making it rather difficult to survive. The home versions – among the first home video games ever produced by Sega – lacked the graphic and audio flair of the coin-op, but retained most of the game play elements.
Grade: A+

"ASSIMILATE THIS!"

There's a vast ocean of difference between the original (authorized) Star Trek game and the latest game to bear the name of that most hallowed and self-important of sci-fi franchises. But, to give credit to both Sega and Activision, both games are a hoot.

The games also say something about the property on which they are based. In the various ***Star Wars*** games, resource management is barely a factor to be reckoned with; how does one measure the Force anyway? There are many ***Star Wars*** games in which one can happily blast away without so much as a twinge of fear that the ammo's about to run dry. Star Trek, on the other hand, is a different animal. This is a show with an ardent faction of fans who collect blueprints, technical manuals, and obsess over how this fictional stuff *works.* (A little hint: *it doesn't.*) I mean, I consider myself a bit of a Trekkie, but I weep to think what these wanna-be warp physicists could be doing for society if they would apply that same brainpower to real-life problems. Not all of the show's fans are like that, but that segment of the Trekkie population frequently scares me. And it's no accident that games based on Star Trek focus on keeping your ship in good health. Now, bearing in mind that this is perhaps a little more realistic than chalking it all up to the Force, there's a part of me that would dearly love to blast my way through *Star Trek: Invasion*'s fast-action battles without worrying about the shields and the photon torpedoes. That said, the latter-day Trek game wins my classic gaming seal of approval: yes, there *are* cut scenes, but you can abort them, and most of the briefings from Worf, threats from aliens, and so forth occur *during* the game, rather than slowing it down. There is a clearly defined storyline, but unlike so many other modern games, the player is not a slave to that storyline. I like that – I like it a lot. *Invasion* is a worthy successor.

NOW

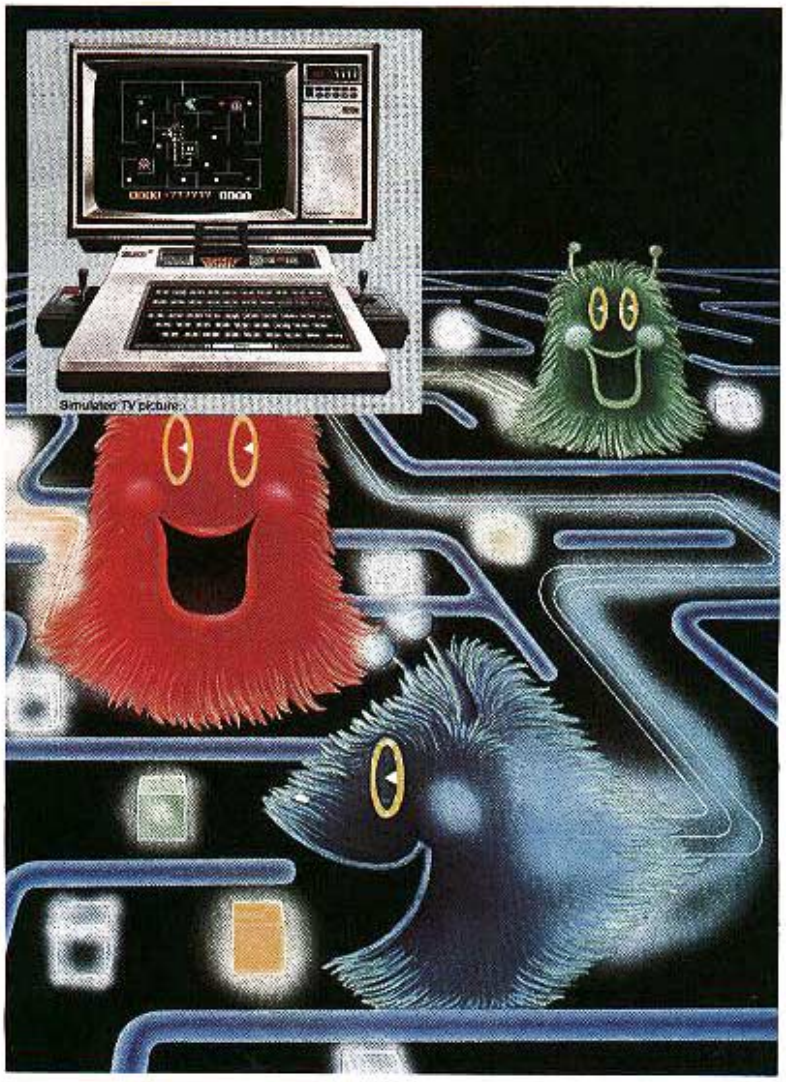
Star Trek: Invasion (Activision, 2000)
Platform: **PlayStation**

Is this even the same game? Well, yes…sort of. A heads-up display still keeps you apprised of your engine and weapons levels, but this game – set in the Next Generation/Deep Space Nine era – really revs up the 3-D element of the game. No longer are you piloting a stately, city-sized ship such as the *Enterprise.* In this game, you're just one of a number of hotshot fighter pilots giving the Federation's new *Valkyrie* fighters their baptism of fire. Whereas the original Trek game pitted you against Klingons, your instructor/commander in *Invasion* is none other than Worf, with occasional visits from Captain Picard. A new Borg invasion fleet is zipping toward Earth at warp nine-point-eight-five-bajillion, and apparently your little squad o' fighters is all that stands between the human race and assimilation. In addition to the Borg, you're pestered by Romulans, Cardassians, and some brand new enemies along the way. While the resource management angle of *Strategic Operations Simulator* is still there, it doesn't play as important a role in this game as simply opening a can of intergalactic whoop-ass on the invading forces. Whereas *SOS* kept things strictly on a two-dimensional playing field – never would you have to deal with enemy ships firing at you from above or below – *Invasion* is a killer simulation of real 3-D space combat, with banks, rolls, strafing runs, and all kinds of close calls…*if* you can master the controls. It's actually quite a lot of fun, but the controls can be a little aggravating at times – enough to make me pine for the one-joystick-and-an-action-button days of the 2600 version.
Grade: B

Classic Advertisement

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, MUNCH.

With new K.C. Munchkin from Odyssey², you don't destroy your enemies, you simply eat them.



How many Munchies can your Munchkin munch before your Munchkin's all munched out? Play K.C. Munchkin and see!

It's fun. It's exciting. It's challenging. Your whole family will love it!

A Munchkin, three Munchers and 12 Munchies float in a maze with a rotating center. The more Munchies your Munchkin munches, the more points you get. The more points, the faster the computer makes the game go. And the more skill you need to score and to keep your Munchkin from getting munched by one of the Munchers!

The better you play, the greater the challenge!

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1982

My Twenty Five Cents

by Damien Quicksilver

SNES - The system I love to hate

I often think back to how I used to look forward to the introduction of new video game systems. This changed with the introduction of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES). That was when the "classic" spirit jumped up inside of me and said, "Newer isn't necessarily better!" Things haven't been the same since. My story starts the month the SNES came out.

My family only had so much money. To be blunt, we were poor. Our NES and all its games were in the pawn shop, and we had to make a choice: Buy the SNES or get the NES out of pawn. We chose the SNES. We chose wrong, dead wrong. The SNES came with one game: Super Mario World. We knew when we spent the money that we would only have that one game for months. I figured that if Super Mario World (SMW) was even BETTER than Super Mario Brothers 3 (SMB3), I would easily be entertained for months. Unfortunately, SMW was horribly inferior to SMB3.

To begin, there were fewer power-ups. There were no "real" bricks. The Firey Mario did not look as cool as in SMB3. In SMW, he had the same old outfit from Super Mario Brothers 1, while in SMB3, he had this cool glowing-orange-as-if-glowing-from-fire look. The Cape Mario in SMW replaced the Raccoon Mario of SMB3. The Cape Mario had more powers, however the Raccoon Mario simply had more charm. A friend of mine pointed out that the Cape "made more sense." However, we agreed that the Cape wasn't as cool. As I said, "Mushrooms make you grow, and flowers make you shoot fireballs- Mario isn't *supposed* to make sense."

Needless to say, it wasn't long before we grew nostalgic for the NES. We even started to wish we had the old Atari 2600 that we never-knew-where-it-had-gone. At one point, we actually unhooked the SNES to hook up an *Aquarius*. (And I don't care what you say, Aquarius was bad, really bad.) But back to the point; SMW wasn't the only reason SNES was inferior to NES.

One of the all-important games on our NES had been Tetris. I remember that we had borrowed my uncle's Tetris so many times that he finally bought us our own copy. No Tetris = no fun. Well, not quite, but it was probably on everyone's favorite game list. For a while the closest thing to come out for the SNES was *Blastris,* a light-gun rendition of Tetris. It wasn't quite the same, but could have been very good had in not been for the necessity of using the SNES's **horrible** Super-Scope. Eventually, the SNES came out with a Tetris/Dr. Mario on one cartridge. With it came something that the official Nintendo version of Tetris for the NES didn't have– a two-player feature. While this was a great addition, it was missing my favorite feature of the NES version– the level 9 height 1-5 "endings." I had made it one of my life goals to be able to beat those levels and get those "endings." When I succeeded on the NES, all the characters began singing and dancing; I did it on the Gameboy and got a space shuttle blasting off; I did it on the SNES and got the message- "Congratulations, you beat Level 9 Height 5" or something equally bland. It was really quite disappointing.

"The SNES is the first system where I really saw the attitude 'Good graphics make up for a bad game' in game-design."

The other SNES game that was disappointing was Final Fight. On the plus side, it had character sprites much larger than the NES could offer. On the minus side, good NES programming had given me the feeling that brawling games needed a good two-player mode. Specifically, Double Dragon 3 (for NES) was much better. There were a total of four characters (although two were identical, making a total of three *unique* characters), and two players could play simultaneously. In Final Fight (for SNES) there were only two characters, and worse, only one player could play. Final Fight 2 and 3 fixed this problem, I understand, but by then I was already bored with SNES brawling.

There are plenty more examples of bad games- too numerous to mention them all. Almost all of the games released within the first year or two seemed totally incompetent. And even though they eventually started to shape up, it was, for me, too little- too late. Go to almost any SNES owner's library and you will see that *really* good SNES games remain few and far between. The SNES was the first system where I really saw the attitude "good graphics make up for a bad game" in game-design. This is the attitude which has come to destroy almost all of the "classic spirit" in the common gamer. But the companies who monopolize on this attitude will, ironically, be the ones who bring it back. Even now, gamers everywhere are raising their voices against "bad games with good graphics." For every hundred people who BUY a bad game, at least one will see it for what it really is. One more Classic Gamer voice. WE ARE that voice.

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Now that you've pulled your DVD player out of the box and watched ***The Matrix*** sixteen bajillion times - both with and without the commentary - what next? Well, believe it or not, your DVD player may be a real live classic gaming machine.

First, step into your Wayback Machine, time-hopping DeLorean, or TARDIS, and revisit the year 1983, when the coin-op video game industry was *sure* - I mean, they were absolutely *positive* - that the Next Big Thing was here, and the future belonged to laserdisc games.

In laserdisc games, a simple processor awaited user input and would then decide whether or not the correct pre-programmed action had been performed at the right time. Depending upon the outcome, that processor would then seek out, as fast as the machine's built-in industrial grade laserdisc player would allow, an appropriate digitally-recorded video clip - either the next few moments of your adventure, or your character's hideous and painful death.

The first of these games received a lot of attention. Don Bluth, the animator behind ***The Secret of NIMH*** and approximately two animated minutes of the movie ***Xanadu***, created Dirk the Daring and Princess Daphne, and banished them to Starcom's *Dragon's Lair.* The publicity generated by this new method of creating a game was considerable, and everyone from Atari to Stern scrambled to create their own laserdisc-driven games. But Bluth, with Starcom chief Rick Dyer, already had a follow-up planned in *Space Ace,* and eventually they also released *Dragon's Lair II: Timewarp.*

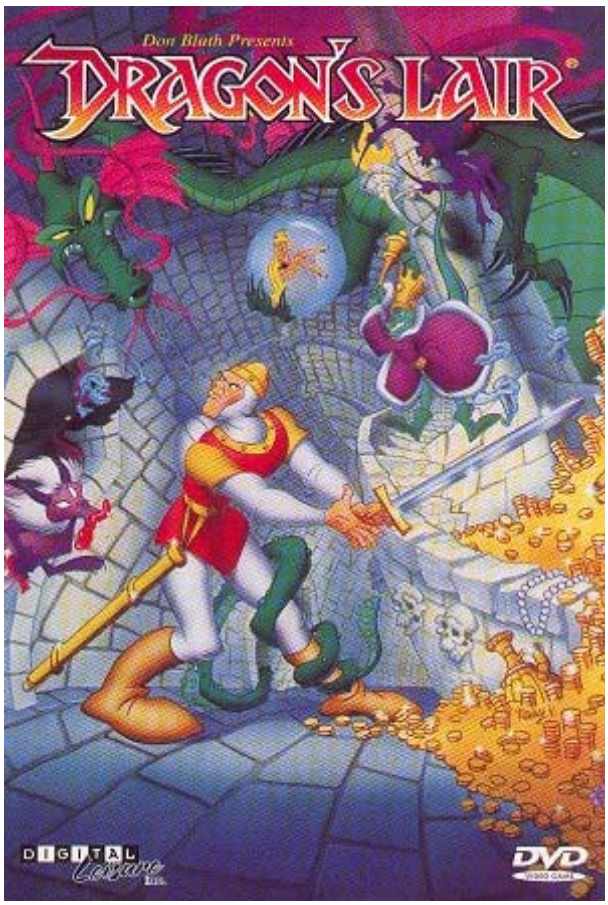
As pretty as the laserdisc games were to look at - admittedly, the Disney-style animation was a revelation in a day and age when *Zaxxon, Pole Position,* and *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom* were considered games with groundbreaking graphics capabilities - the games were also nothing more than electronic choose-your-path books (Remember those from your childhood? "If you're going to fight the wizard, go to page 29. If you decide to escape down the other corridor, turn to page 35 instead.") *Dragon's Lair, Space Ace,* and other games of their ilk had pre-programmed structures. If you didn't move your joystick or hit your button at the right time in accordance with those structures, you'd lose a life.

Now, I know you've missed these games. You long for the days when scantily-clad Princess Daphne cavorted about and squealed advice to Dirk in a high-pitched voice that could cause harm to small pets. You miss the fun of geeky Dexter transforming into Space Ace almost at random - and then changing back at the most inopportune moments. Fear not, true laser believers - the experience *can* be yours again!

Digital Leisure has re-mastered the original animation elements and turned out multi-path DVDs of the Don Bluth trilogy of games that can actually be played once more, using your DVD remote control's direction buttons as a joystick and the "select" button as an action button.

But is this necessarily a *good* thing?

Setting aside the rat-in-a-maze style of game play that these games relied upon, the DVD versions aren't without problems. Much relies upon the infrared signal strength and response time



of your remote control, and even with a better player, you have to keep in mind that DVD players were meant to spin movies, not play games. The lag time is an absolute killer with these games - you can expect a wait of two to three seconds to find out if you've led Dirk or Dexter to the next scene, or to the aforementioned hideous and painful death. It's a pretty embarrassing blow to the otherwise compelling technology of DVD when a laserdisc player from 1983 had less response lag time.

Fortunately, given that Bluth's laser games were almost unplayable at times, each game has a "watch" mode, which takes you through every scene of the game, sans lags, as if you were peering over the shoulder of someone who was playing a perfect game. There are some nice pre-requisite DVD extras as well. *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* both feature video histories of the games in the form of news clips, circa 1983, many from TV stations in and around Starcom's home base in Denver. (But rather frustratingly, both games feature more or less the same clips - there isn't much history that's unique to either title.) *Dragon's Lair II* features pencil-drawn rough animations of the entire game on a separate track - sort of an animator's non-verbal commentary track.

You've probably noticed that I haven't said much about the harder-to-find *Dragon's Lair II.* If you missed it in the arcades… count your blessings. It had much more of a storyline than its simpler ancestor, but that storyline was steeped in elements plagiarized from such sources as ***Alice In Wonderland*** and Disney's ***Jungle Book***. That game's obscurity is probably all that prevented it from drawing a look-and-feel lawsuit from Walt Disney Studios.

There are also compatibility problems with Digital Leisure's laserdisc-games-on-DVD. To put it simply, if you have one of a few certain specific models of Toshiba DVD player, or an Aiwa or Samsung brand player, you're not going to be swashing your buckle with Dirk the Daring any time soon. I'm not sure what the compatibility issues with those models are…but they work okay on my el cheapo Panasonic DVD player.

Digital Leisure has also released PC-compatible DVD-ROM versions of all three games in a "PC bundle," but not having a DVD-ROM drive or those versions of the game, I can't give a review on those products.

Is it worth it? Whew…*barely.* I'd only recommend these DVD games for the most diehard of classic gamers, or perhaps rabid *Dragon's Lair* or *Space Ace* fans. For my own tastes, these games barely cut it as games even when they were in the arcades…and these playable DVD versions, though beautifully remastered, hardly make the cut as home video games. They *look* great…but do you really want to spend $30 or more per game when the most compelling feature is the "watch" mode? If there was a good player back in the days when these games were new, you could look over his shoulder at the arcade and watch for free.

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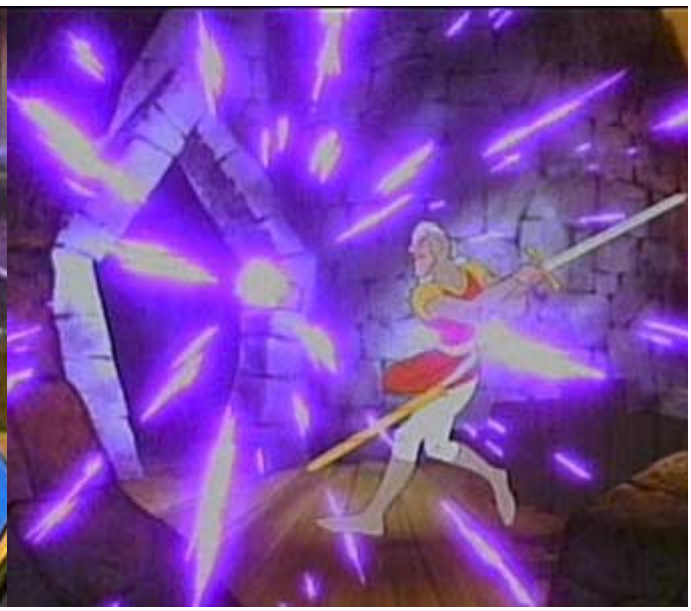

A Lesson in Humility

How I Tapped Out On TAPPER

If you're anything like me, you probably haven't played too many of the original arcade games since your youth. Sure, there is the occasional Ms. Pac-Man or Galaga, but when was the last time you actually played the real arcade version of Tapper or Jungle Hunt or Moon Patrol? It's probably been a really long time. Well, MAME came along and changed all that! Now all the arcade games are at your disposal and you can play to your heart's content! I know this is old news, but think about the time before MAME, when the only version of Tutankham or Bump n Jump that you could play was on your Colecovision, Atari 2600, or Intellivision. Ok, keep that thought as you read this article.

A long time ago, in a basement far, far away (if you must have actual dates and places, it was 3+ years ago in my basement in Ohio)...I would play my Colecovision for hours and hours. While my friends spent their hard earned money on PlayStation games, I was hoarding obsolete carts. I had been doing it for some time. It was a way to recapture my youth. Great games like Up n Down, Tapper, and Frenzy were keeping me busy and I was a master! As I swept through level after level of Tapper, I felt like a combination of Tom Cruise (from Cocktail) and Sam Malone! On Up n Down, I could race through levels with a skill that would make Jeff Gordon jealous! I was the arcade king! Visions of sitting on a throne in an arcade with a large, golden crown on my head and groupies at my feet were in my mind. I wished for the day that I could find an arcade to play these games again and prove my mastery!

As the old saying goes, be careful what you wish for. Soon after my wish, along came MAME. For the first time, one emulator allowed you to play many arcade games. I had seen emulators before that would do one game or a couple, but I never bothered with them. But MAME was different; it offered a large selection! Not only did it offer a lot of games, but new games were being emulated all the time! Soon, I found all my favorite arcade games being ported to MAME! Now I would have the ability to prove my mastery of the arcade games! I would be king!

Then reality sunk in. I stunk at these games. All that practice on the Colecovision was for naught. Those home games were easier versions and I was duped into thinking I was some great master. At first, I blamed the controller. Who could be an arcade master when you had to use a keyboard? Would Mozart do as well with a toy piano? Would Babe Ruth be a home run hitter with a whiffle ball bat? I was in deep denial, and I had to come up with a way to prove that with the right equipment, I would be the arcade champ.

Once again, my wish was granted (if I knew I had such powers, I would have saved them for much more valuable things). I found a website selling an arcade quality stick for my PC computer called the V-Stick. It looked great in the picture with the two joysticks and the buttons, real arcade buttons! I sent in my money order and waited for it! And waited. And waited. It took over 15 weeks for the darn thing to arrive, but when it did, I was ready to recapture my imaginary arcade crown. I would be king!

Know what, it didn't happen. Even with the superior joystick, I still stunk at these games. Where on the Colecovision version of Tapper, I could get through all the levels and then some, on the arcade version, I couldn't get past the second level (the fair). On Up n Down, I went from being Jeff Gordon to being an old man in a hatchback. It was a lesson in humility. The illusion was gone and with it, my dreams of being crowned king. I soon realized that I was just an average arcade player who was duped into thinking he was something more by the watered down arcade versions on the home consoles.

It was a hard lesson to learn. No one wants to admit they aren't great at something. But I now know that I am just your ordinary, average game player.

I'm just another guy who learned the hard way that the only way to be great at an arcade game is by playing the actual arcade game. While it has been humbling, at least now I can practice on MAME and someday I will rule the arcades! Someday I will wear the crown!

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Classifieds

WANTED: Gamate and Mega Duck cartridges, Timex/Sinclair cartridges, Voltmace Mark III cartridges, MPT-02/MPT-03 cartridges, Romtec Color-vision cartridges, and other obscure/odd stuff! Russ Perry Jr, 2175 S Tonne Dr. #105, Arlington Hts IL 60005, slapdash@enteract.com

WANTED: Entex Adventure Vision gaming system and/or cartridges. Items be boxed or loose, working or not, any condition wanted. Contact ima-vidiot@adventurevision.zzn.comor visit www.adventurevision.com for more details.

WANTED: If you have SMS James "Buster" Douglas for sale or trade, contact me! coleman@wantree.com.au

WANTED: 2600 protos, NTSC Ikari Warriors (trade for PAL version?), LockJaw, Midnight Magic (c)1986, Saving Mary, Shooting Arcade (Atari) 1984 Rev A poster/catalog ANY Atari-related merchandise, Atari Music CD's vols. 1 & 2, Star Raiders Kid's book, manuals, boxes, magazine, etc. Scott Stilphen scottith@ptd.net

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Poetry Contest Winners!! (Yeah, we know…"Finally!")

For the past few issues we've held a poetry/haiku contest. Due to some of the fun responses we were receiving, we decided to extend the contest over several issues. Well, at last we have winners! Clentin C. Martin Jr. and John Shawler, congratulations!

Clentin C. Martin Jr.
Greensburg, PA

"Missile Command"

On cold winter afternoons
We welcomed
Krytol's missiles with
Wide eyes and joysticks
Until only one city
Remained

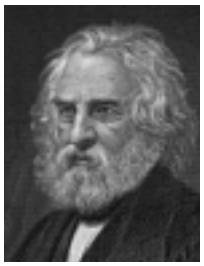
The end fell from the sky--
Helpless to defend
Zardon's electronic landscape--
Missile upon missile
The sound bore down
And the screen flashed
OUR DEATH

On some Saturday afternoon
As a Kid in the early
1980s

John Shawler
Athens, OH

Mega Force Haiku

Mega Force was a very
Very very bad movie
But a good game



Who could possibly argue with tearjerkers like these? Well, ok, probably a lot of you! In that case we'll hold another contest soon.

These talented poets won themselves the fine tome, "Phoenix, The Fall and Rise of Videogames," signed by the author, Leonard Herman.

We'll be posting more of our favorite entries on our website @ www.classicgamer.com. And staying true to form, that probably won't happen for another 2 to 3 years.

I learned many things and got to meet many people at Classic Gaming Expo (CGE) 2000. You probably don't care much about who I met in person for the first time (although it included the illustrious duo of Chris Cavanaugh and Sarah Thomas), so I thought I'd share some of the things I learned while there. There was so much to see, do, and learn at CGE that I'm doubtless leaving out many interesting things, but Chris will only give me so much room. Most, but not all, of my new knowledge came from the discussion panels and keynote speeches. I primarily attended the Atari 2600 related ones, so this article is biased toward it. My apologies for that. By covering what was new to me, I'm sure there will be something new here for every reader, even if you're Leonard Herman (whom I also met).

Atari 2600 Panel

- Steve Cartwright was Activision employee number 26.
- A two-man salvage team named Seaquest sued Activision after seeing the Atari 2600 Seaquest game, thinking it had been named after their business.
- Bob Polaro is currently writing games in Java. He feels this has a lot in common with the old days of video games where the games were one-man creations.

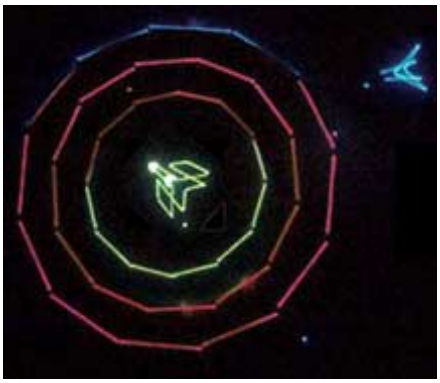
"Antenna" by Steve Woita

- It took an entire day for Steve Woita to record the speech in Quadrun and get it under 700 bytes.

- Approximately 10,000 Quadrun cartridges were manufactured for the Atari 2600.
- Mike Albis' (Atari Games employee for 24 years) corollary to Nolan Bushnell's theorem that "a game should be easy to learn but difficult to master": You should be able to play the game with one hand in order to hold your beer or girlfriend in the other.
- Brad Stewart played a game of coin-op Breakout against newly hired Ian Shepherd to decide who would program the Atari 2600 version. Stewart cleared the board with his first ball, thus winning the contest.
- Someone in marketing at Atari actually asked Rob Fulop where he'd gotten the idea for the Atari 2600 game Night Driver. (It was an Atari coin-op first.)

Howard Scott Warshaw

- Most of the information listed under here actually came from the Atari 2600 keynote, but he was the liveliest panel member and contributed enough information to warrant his own section.
- Although Yars' Revenge was planned to be a Star Castle port, at no time did the programmed game actually resemble Star Castle any more than the final game does. Warshaw immediately realized that the 2600 wasn't capable of reproducing the game well. (And besides, Atari ended up not getting the license for it.)
- The original name for Yars' Revenge was 'Time Freeze'.
- Steven Spielberg asked Warshaw if he couldn't just do something like Pac-Man for the Atari 2600 E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial game. Warshaw said no, saying there was no point in rehashing someone else's game. In retrospect, he quips, it may not have been a bad idea.
- The comic book packaged with Yars' Revenge is a simplified version of the story Warshaw created for the game. He was given a choice of taking credit for the game or the story, as credit for both was too much, he was told by Atari.
- According to Warshaw, Yars' Revenge was the first game Atari pro-



"Star Castle"

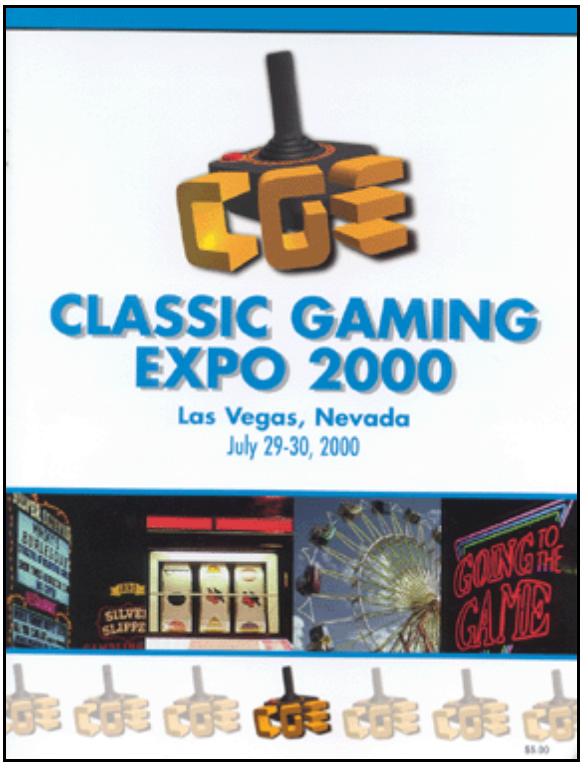
duced with official credit to the programmer and an officially approved Easter egg.

Joe Decuir

- Decuir, one of the primary designers of the Atari 2600 hardware, didn't know there was an Atari 2600 light gun game released (Sentinel), but knew it was possible to create one.
- Decuir wishes he had patented the color-cycling used in Atari 2600 games to prevent burn-in, but in his words, “they didn't think you could patent software back then.”
- Decuir's mother was proud because color-cycling was the reason *Consumer Reports* gave the Atari 2600 the highest ranking when they reviewed home video game consoles.
- Decuir's then 13-year-old brother "kicked his ass" at Combat, even though Decuir had created the game.
- In retrospect, Decuir admits that saving five cents per 2600 console by using a 24-pin instead of 30-pin chip was a mistake. Using a 30-pin chip would have allowed the creation of games larger than 4K without having to resort to bank-switching.
- The Atari 2600 used chips with 15 micron circuits. The Microsoft X-Box, which Decuir is currently helping design, uses .015 micron chips. That's 1000 times smaller!
- The original Atari 2600 consoles were heavy on purpose. Atari felt consumers would feel ripped off if they paid $200 for it and it weighed almost nothing.
- Atari ultimately decided not to build speakers into the 2600 for two reasons. First was the extra cost. Second was that by using the television speaker, consumers had built-in volume control.

Ralph Baer

- It was not until 1967 that Baer, who is called "the father of video games" for his invention of what eventually became the original Magnavox Odyssey (the world's first home video game console), had the idea for a machine-controlled ball. Up till then, it was controlled manually by a person.
- The original use of what would become the Magnavox Odyssey light gun was for quiz games. Each spot on the TV could be encoded somehow so that the machine knew which answer the user selected (or at least if it was correct or not).



- Ralph Baer said his idea for sending games via cable (TV) was 30 years too soon. (He was comparing it to playing games via the World Wide Web.)
- Approximately 20,000 Odyssey light rifles were sold compared to 95,000-100,000 consoles.
- In court, some companies claimed that because their "pongs" were digital, they were therefore completely different from the analog Odyssey. (This didn't hold up.)
- According to Baer, Bushnell preferred to have Magnavox keep "the riffraff" out of the video game industry than fight their lawsuit.
- Magnavox was still in litigation with other companies for video game patent violations (related to the Magnavox Odyssey) as recently as 1997. (Notably Taito and Data East.)
- Baer is hesitant to donate the "Brown Box" Odyssey prototype to the Smithsonian because they have so many exhibits. However, there's an inventor's museum that he may donate it to. He believes it should be available to be played by visitors wherever it ends up.
- It was two Scottish men who had the idea for "pong-on-a-chip" at General Instruments.
- Sanders Associates, the company Baer worked for when he invented the home video game console, made about four arcade games that did well. They then made elaborate plans for the future that fell apart in the end.

Miscellaneous

- Hasbro Interactive was approached by Columbia (or whoever owns it now) about including a copy of the Krull Atari 2600 game on the upcoming *Krull* DVD. I don't know how they plan to use it (an emulator on a DVD player?) or what the results of this request were.
- You may have noticed interesting happenings at Twin Galaxies, such as a redesigned web site and the advent of shooting their own video footage. It turns out that Twin Galaxies now has a billionaire investor. Before this individual came along, Twin Galaxies was on the verge of going under.

And there you have it. A concise list of the things I learned at CGE 2000, from the trivial to the slightly less trivial. I hope those of you who attended learned many things as well and that both those who did and didn't will benefit, in some bizarre way, from this article. Even you, Leonard.

CGM

Atari's Misplays and Bogeys

By Patrick Wong

Atari is synonymous with legendary arcade/action videogames. From Asteroids, to Missile Command, to Tempest, videogamers will find very few games they would consider forgettable. However, when it comes to sports videogames, gamers will have to think a little harder.

Atari's first generation of sports games would end up being some of the worst videogames ever created; they were simple and pathetic. From the bland background colors, to the stick figure-like graphics and simple sounds, Atari's sports games generally went from bad to worse.

Few of them rarely resembled the sports they were advertised to be. Of all the sports titles, only Atari's Bowling would come anywhere close to the actual sport. Almost all the other titles would fall far short. Two in particular, Atari's **Homerun** and **Golf,** would end up being two of the worst videogames ever made.

Imagine being a kid again in your backyard getting ready to play a game of stick ball. You and your sibling would place 4 boxes around the yard for bases and throw around the ol' ball and swing the stick. Maybe a couple of your friends would come over and your small group would try to make a real game of it. Atari would try to make a real game out of stickball.

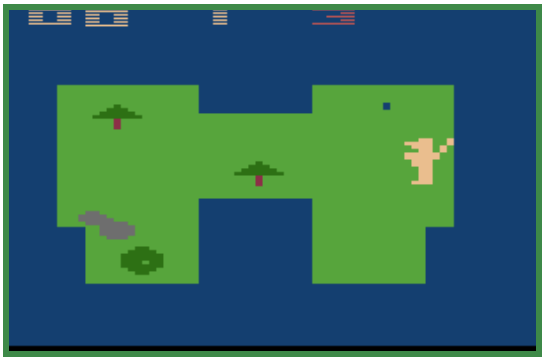
Atari's Homerun is what would happen if your backyard game of stickball became a videogame. At first glance, gamers will be shown a boring green background, along with 4 boxes for bases, a batter (colored blue), a pitcher (colored orange), the score on the top of the screen, and 4 big letters (I for inning, O for out, B for balls, and S for strike).

Upon closer inspection, you'll be disappointed to find out that the pitcher doesn't have a pitcher's mound. He's actually standing near second base so it looks like a pitching rubber. You'll also notice that the batter isn't even holding the bat! This means you're swinging the stick by itself rather than the batter when you hit.

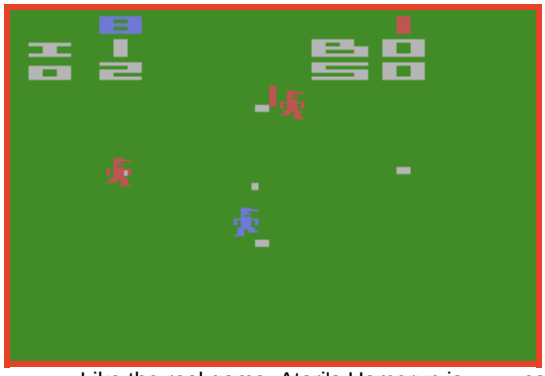
Other major flaws become apparent as you flip the "Select" switch and realize that you can only have up to 3 players on the field (1 pitcher and 2 infielders on either side of the pitcher). You can, however, select to have the infielders play close to the pitcher or the corners of the bags.

The pitcher has 3 pitches - fast, slow, and curve. He actually has a 4th: a slow to fast (or vice-versa) pitch that's never before seen (or ever again) in a baseball game. One of the few fun features of the game is that you actually have total control over your pitches. You can even create your own crazy combination pitches (for example, a slow to fast to curve pitch) that your friend will surely swing for and strike out with.

If the ball is hit, you never have to worry about throwing errors. When a ball is hit and fielded by either of the fielders, the other 2 will disappear, leaving only the runner and fielder to race for the bag



or be chased and tagged out. Other things you don't have to worry about: bunts, pop flies, stealing bases, grounders, or sacrifices. None of these plays are featured in this game. All hits are line drives; either a slow or fast line drive. If a line drive touches second base and clears the bottom of the screen untouched, it'll be ruled a homerun. If the ball doesn't touch second and leaves the screen, it may be a double or triple, depending on how fast the ball was hit and how many bases your runner(s) can cover while the ball travels to the bottom of the screen.



Like the real game, Atari's Homerun is played through the length of 9 innings. It's almost like the real game except that the home team has to bat at the bottom of the 9th even if they're winning, and the game doesn't go into extra innings; instead it'll end tied!

Gamers looking for a real baseball experience will have to look elsewhere. Lots of gamers would end up buying Homerun for the love of the game rather than wanting to actually own this title. They'll have to look elsewhere to satisfy their sporting needs.

Golf anyone? How about 9 holes?

Atari's Golf is another fine example, of how not to do a sports game. It would be the first (and last) popular Golf game on the Atari 2600 VCS. Atari would try hard to make this game challenging, offering 9 holes. To win, you must finish the game with a par score of 36 or less.

The graphics were simplistic; a big yellow golfer, light green fairways, dark green greens, dark green trees, grey sandtraps, and blue water hazards. You can choose with a flip of the difficulty switches whether to have the cup (hole) big or small and if you want the rough to be in play.

Golf would end up being one of the slowest games ever. First, the swing. By holding the red button down, you can control how hard you'd like your golfer to swing. However, you'll have to wait for him to pull his club all the way back before you can follow through if you want him to swing his hardest. Unfortunately, the time it takes to swing closely resembles watching the hands on a clock get wound up. It even makes an annoying ticking noise to complete the effect.

More problems add to this displeasure. The playing field is so small that most of the time you'll find yourself chipping the ball from one spot to another. Chances are, the ball will end up in the rough or a sandtrap and you'll spend most of your time trying to dig it out. Or worse, if you don't have the rough in play, the ball will act as if it just hit a wall and refuse to move, at which point you'll have to chip away until it's back on a clear part of the fairway.

When you're on the green, the game becomes somewhat easier. Usually you can make the put in a stroke or two. There's almost no interference, and somehow you get the feeling that Atari would have had a better golf game if they just removed all the obstacles and made it a putting game. Clearly the Atari VCS wasn't meant for golf.

In the end, the Atari 2600 VCS just wasn't meant for sports games because their cartridges were limited to 2K. Atari owners would have to wait in despair while Intellivision owners had the superior sport titles. Atari wouldn't be able to answer with a strong sport series until their RealSports series years later.

There was a time when Atari was the only game in town and owners had to love to hate playing these sport games. Even today, dedicated videogame collectors probably hate having them in their collection.

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Arcadia/Starpath Supercharger	___	___	SuperNintendo	___	___
Intellivision	___	___	Nintendo 64	___	___
ColecoVision	___	___	Sony Playstation	___	___
Odyssey 2	___	___	Sega Master System	___	___
Atari 5200	___	___	Sega Genesis	___	___
Atari 7800	___	___	Sega Saturn	___	___
Atari Jaguar	___	___	Sega 32X	___	___
Atari Lynx	___	___	Atari 400/800	___	___
Nintendo 8 Bit (NES)	___	___	Apple II	___	___
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My Secret Shame

Last week I went to a friend's birthday and was amazed at how "grown-up" all my friends have become. Conversations consisted of adult-like things such as buying houses, getting married, having children and stock options. Not in that order, of course, because everything today stems from stock options. Still, very grown up conversations indeed.

Whenever these topics come up, I always think about how they don't apply to me because that is "grown up talk" and I am still a kid. I do not feel vaguely like an adult even though I am the ripe old age of 36. Based on my lifestyle, no one would or could ever consider me remotely adult-like:

- I do not have stock options.
- I'm not anywhere near getting married (let's not even go there…)
- I do not own a home—and living in Silicon Valley the chances of that happening are pretty slim. (see stock options, above).
- I have not now, nor do I think I will ever attempt to balance my checkbook.
- I have no thoughts of ever being a parent (because I am NOT going to share my toys).
- I am 36 and still have toys that I am not willing to share.
- I have more in common with a high school freshman than I do my "adult" peers.

I am probably the least adult-like person anyone will ever meet. I actually bought a car recently and during each step when I was approved for the loan, the car, or the insurance, I was stunned. "What fools!," I mumbled to myself, "How could they have fallen for my thinly veiled mature act? Don't they know I'm the least mature person they'll ever meet?"

When I got the phone call that this article was to be about my Secret Shame, I could not figure out how I was going to put my entire life onto the back page of the magazine, to which I immediately suffered an anxiety attack. My attack subsided when I realized that by not "totally freaking out" and instead having a very adult-like "anxiety attack"—well, I was on my way to eventually becoming an adult. I briefly had the urge to balance my checkbook. But, thankfully, that moment passed quickly.

Finally, it was explained to me (in simple terms that I could easily understand) that I was to write about my Guilty Pleasure. I sat uncomfortably silent on the phone for a minute and the voice said, "About video games!" Whew! That could have been embarrassing.

Weeks later, I got another call saying I was two weeks late on my deadline and no one could figure out what my problem was (there was a constant stream of suggestions and some very rude comments in general, but no one could actually *figure out* just what was my problem). I hated to admit it, but my secret shame/guilty pleasure was not with a particular game on my Atari 2600, but the Atari 2600 itself.

My friends—my mature, married, house owning, child rearing, checkbook balancing friends—do play video games, so I am not ashamed to be playing games. Sure they bought the game systems for their kids, but few children have the necessary motor skills to play Cyber Tiger at six months. However, these oh-so-adult friends play on Super-Duper Nintendo systems and PlayStations that do things I could never do, like think!

These friends play fast moving, exciting, graphics-intensive games like Speed Punks, Indy Racing 2000, Final Fantasy VIII and the like. They play with people like Mario and Zelda; they battle along with John Madden and Bubba Harris.

Me? I'm still trying to master Sneak 'n Peek.

Their systems have mountains of memory, codes, and things like bits—lots and lots of bits. I don't think my Atari has any bits… maybe a mere quark to their mountain of bits. But certainly no bits to actually speak of.

To the powers that be at Classic Gamer, my all encompassing shame of my life and my subsequent "game envy issues" in regards to my friends was not enough; I was firmly told I needed to supply my all-time favorite guilty pleasure video game. And I was told I needed to tell them *now.*

"Pong," I snapped.

[Lo-o-ong pause]

"Did you say 'Pong?'" came the reply.

"Yes," I smiled feeling relieved. My secret shame at last revealed to the world.

"I said freakin' PONG!"

"Um, Chris… nobody likes Pong."

"I do."

"Seriously. NOBODY likes Pong. People may say they do, but they don't. They're being polite—or possibly big liars. Regardless, no one actually likes Pong. It's too easy. No real skill involved. No graphics. No color. Heck, I don't think it has any bits."

"Could we leave bits out of this?"

"Look," my friend said somberly and very adult-like, "No one in their right mind likes Pong. Come on," he pleaded, "You don't seriously like Pong, do you?"

"I like it… a lot. In fact, I prefer simple black and white and no nothing graphics to a spectrum of color and a load of bits!" I had thrown down the gauntlet and I knew it.

I could actually hear the veins in his forehead bulging. The voice at the other end stammered, trying to find the right words: "What in the world… I mean, where in the… I… who… just what, exactly, is wrong with you?"

This guy was going to make me confess it all. I swallowed hard, "It's the only thing I can play." I felt the relief of confession, so I prepared to lay myself completely bare. "It's slow [like me] and it makes funny and mostly rude little noises [like me]. I like to play a couple of times a week. Certainly not well, but I still like to play." There. I said it… and I liked it.

"There is something so fundamentally wrong with that statement, I just don't know where to begin. How old are you, again?"

"Shut up."

"No, you shut up."

"No, YOU shut up."

"No, why don't YOU shut up?"

"You know," I said, "why don't you stop acting like a child and grow up!" Suddenly, the urge to balance my checkbook overtook me. I quickly hung up, turned on my Atari 2600, and played Pong alone in the dark until well past midnight. I will fight growing up with every fiber of my being. With the help of my Atari 2600 and my beloved Pong, I will continue to be a poor excuse for an adult for a few more years.

But let's just keep that a secret between you and me.

Chris Lion CGM

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